

## in the heat of the summer (you're so different from the rest) by kaboomslang

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Alternate Ending, Domestic Fluff, Eddie Kaspbrak's Hot Girl Summer, First Kiss, First Time, Fix-It, Internalized Homophobia, Love Confessions, M/M, POV Richie Tozier, Panic Attacks, Post-IT Chapter Two (2019), Romance, Sharing Clothes, cute middle aged man dates, eddie moves to california and richie is a mess, richie is an unreliable narrator and also a service top, so much sex, this is the horniest thing i've ever written, very mild angst

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier, The Losers Club (IT)

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-10-14

**Updated:** 2019-12-05

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 16:39:15

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 14

**Words:** 73,949

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

*There's a heatwave in L.A., the first time Richie sees Eddie naked.*

or

One very hot year in the life of two idiots in love, working shit out.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

Well, here it is. I have to explain myself; I started this as a pwp about Richie seeing Eddie's dick for the first time. Then it somehow mutated into the longest thing I've ever written. Cause let's face it, we all needed a domestic fluffy happy ending after that mcfucking movie.

Title is from Brockhampton's song "[SUMMER](#)" which is a super sexy gay slow jam, go listen to it if you want the vibe for this fic:

*Oh yes, you know*

*In the heat of the summer*

*You're so different from the rest*

*You know, you know, you know,*

*You know that you should be my boy*

*Oh yes, you do*

Once again, huge thanks to [elephantastic](#) for beta reading when she doesn't even go here. I love you bonch, I ain't never gonna stop loving you bonnnnch

*By the first of August  
the invisible beetles began  
to snore and the grass was  
as tough as hemp and was  
no color—no more than  
the sand was a color and  
we had worn our bare feet  
bare since the twentieth  
of June and there were times  
we forgot to wind up your  
alarm clock and some nights  
we took our gin warm and neat  
from old jelly glasses while  
the sun blew out of sight  
like a red picture hat and*

*one day I tied my hair back  
with a ribbon and you said  
that I looked almost like  
a puritan lady and what  
I remember best is that  
the door to your room was  
the door to mine.*

- *I Remember*, by Anne Sexton

There's a heatwave in L.A. the first time Richie sees Eddie naked.

It's because of the heatwave that it happens in the first place, and even then it takes nine months. Nine long months since Derry clawed them all back, spitting up an extra lifetime's worth of pain and memory and hope. More than enough to go on. More than enough to build new lives upon, all of them changed for the better, save for poor Stan. Foundations of history and friendship springing up where before there was only a gap in Richie's mind, white and blank, like a test paper he didn't care about failing.

There's something in the way Eddie stares at him in the Jade of the Orient.

Richie feels it too, the snapping electricity. All the air sucked into a sinkhole, leaving behind the heavy ozone of a storm brewing. There he is, surrounded by the only people who had ever let him feel wanted for who he was, instead of how he could make them laugh, and all he can do is stare right back with his shitty jokes blocked by his heart in his mouth.

"So wait, Eddie, you got married? What, to like, a woman?" The shots are the only reason his voice is so bitter.

If Eddie married a woman, then the quivering, disastrous things Richie remembers feeling as a kid are his own to keep and think on, melancholy but accepting. Mature. He can do mature, just watch him.

If Eddie married a man, then — then it was never because Richie was a boy, but simply because he was Richie. Too-much Trashmouth, too-wide mouth and too-long touches. He could never help himself, and that's always been his problem.

If Eddie married a man, and still stares at Richie like he's *remembering* something too, then—

It seems impossible. It feels like standing at the base of a mountain he can't possibly climb, and wanting to try anyway. Eddie stares back and bites back in a challenge, and why is it always a challenge with them, what are they trying to prove to themselves? To each other?

They arm-wrestle. Eddie is just as slight and throat-ripping determined as he ever was, like a miniature pitbull who can match Richie curse-for-curse. His face is flushed with the drinks they've been ramming back, alcohol the only way Richie can rationalize Eddie shouting, "Let's take our shirts off and *kiss*," with the space between their faces so tempting to fall into.

The words startle Richie hard enough that he yanks Eddie's arm clean off the table. Eddie's laughing and swearing so loud with that same goddamn dimple showing in his left cheek, and Richie thinks *Jesus, here's the reason I used to love this guy more than anything else in the world*.

Los Angeles isn't really a place full of dreams. It's smog sinking into your lungs, wildfires ripping down a hillside and too many people fucking over too many others for a shot at something distant and glittering. It's like a riot at a planetarium.

It's too hot. Richie sleeps with the mattress pared down to just the bottom sheet, with his arm stretched out towards Eddie, sleeping in a guest room at the other side of the house.

They're getting drunk again.

It's the only thing any of them wanted to do when they finally pulled

themselves free from the quarry, slimy limbs shaking with victory and relief. Washed clean, baptized into this new reality where monsters are real, and strong, but love between old friends is stronger.

The phrase, *blood is thicker than water*, speaks to the literal opposite of what it implies. Richie read that online. The real saying goes, *the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb*.

It pops into his head as he watches Eddie gripe about there being *three different kinds of fucking sewage all over me, Jesus*, watches Beverly splash him right in the face for his griping and laugh like a chime at his sputtering, dripping shock.

Richie's glasses are cracked. There's blood in the fracture, most likely his own. They're all banged up, all of them forty years old and splitting the seams of their bodies with pains, old and new.

His ass hurts where he landed on the hard, ancient rock of It's lair. The things he saw in the Deadlights hurt more.

"Hey, Eddie?"

"What?"

"Didn't you hear? There are leeches in here, man."

Eddie's wet hair is flat to his skull like a yarmulke. Richie never saw him in one, Mrs K wouldn't let him go to Stan's disaster of a Bar Mitzvah, or anywhere near it.

*Blood of the covenant*. Richie didn't know that word back then, but that's what it was. A circle, a sharp piece of broken glass was enough to bring them all back together. *Fuck that shitty grey womb-water, it's been twenty-seven years and we're still more to you than she ever was, Eds.*

"What the fuck, are you serious? Leeches?" Eddie yelps, standing straight up.

He's so wet-cat scrawny (*so little, like always, I wanted to carry him around in my pocket*) the water still comes up to his chest, rippling

green from how hard everyone's laughing.

"You assholes! Fuck you, Rich, that's the last time I save your lanky ass from a clown!"

And it is. It will be, Richie hopes, because his joints hurt badly enough at forty, he doesn't wanna find himself back here in another three decades fighting off shit with a walker.

It might be the last time they do a lot of things. It might be the last time he sits in the deserted lobby of a Derry hotel, three sheets to the wind with the best group of friends he ever had. The wood-panelled lounge glows with amber light, this whole town preserved like a fossil in golden tree resin. It might be the last time he ever sees Eddie, his dimples, the flushed-drunk pink of his throat, because — they forgot all of this once already. Who's to say it won't happen again? Richie could wave them all goodbye in the rear-view tomorrow and forget their faces as soon as he hits county lines. The thought tugs at his heart so awful and sick that he's following hot on Eddie's heels, yanked up the stairs behind him as if tied to his belt.

It's the first time he's ever stumbled over the threshold of Eddie Kaspbrak's hotel room. And it might be the last, so he's gotta make it count.

The hours slide by, piling up. Richie can't help but feel the countdown clock hanging over his head, his chin propped on his fist at the desk as they talk, talk, and talk more, like it's 1989 and school will never come in the morning if they don't go to sleep.

"C'mon man, don't you wanna — we could hang out in L.A., you're not telling me you don't need a vacation after this shit."

"I need a vacation," Eddie sighs. "I haven't had a vacation in eight years."

"Isn't that how long you've been married?"

"It — yes," Eddie says, the tips of his ears going red, and Richie—

Richie wants to bite them. Wants to take Eddie to a fucking beach, wants to curl around him tonight in the lumpy hotel bed, wants all of

that and everything else as Eddie flips him off for grinning like a real, grade A asshole.

“I got a pool, y’know,” Richie says, a while later. He forces a laugh, and it throbs in his temples. “No leeches, I promise.”

The floral-chintz glow of the lamp turns Eddie’s eyes deeper, and darker, softened into the honey-brown sadness of an old forest, full of regret. He looks up at Richie, who’s hovering as still as he can.

“I’m not busy with anything right now,” he tries. He can feel his own pulse in his jugular. “We can — we can hang out. Like old times.”

“You’re on tour,” Eddie says slowly, and his voice is much softer than the strange look in his eyes.

“Nah, I cancelled after the, uh, fortune cookie incident.” Good thing too, he doesn’t know how he’d explain death by alien clown to his agent if he didn’t turn up to a show.

“You — you’re not joking.”

There’s nothing but lint and the hard metal dig of a hotel key in Richie’s pockets. His hands shake, so he clenches his fists around both. “Nope, not this time.”

“Did you invite any of the others?”

“Uh.” Swallow the knot in your throat, or spit it right out for the whole world to see. Truth or dare. “No.”

Eddie sways closer. They’re both in their socks, so he only comes up to Richie’s nose. The minibar’s well stocked, thank the Lord, and that’s how it starts.

“Come with me,” Richie’s begging, a little later still, with his hands clinging tight around Eddie’s face. Thumb brushing gauze. Eddie’s *real* and *breathing* rawbone body plastered in a scorching line up Richie’s front, against the door. No interruptions, and Eddie can’t leave without going through him, but why would he leave when it’s

his room? Why hasn't he kicked Richie out yet?

"It's hot in L.A., you love the heat, you loved summer, Manhattan's all shitty and cold this time of year, Eds, *please*—"

"I hate the heat," Eddie croaks. Richie's heart hammers, below where Eddie's hands are twisted in his collar like he's trying to rip it off. His pupils are blown wide to iridescent beetle-black in the low light, and his gaze keeps flickering quick between Richie's eyes and his desperate, pleading mouth. "And there are no bugs in Manhattan."

"Dude, there are cockroaches *everywhere* in Manhattan."

The crack in his glasses splits Eddie to fragments, a shaky kaleidoscope mural of lines tensing around an already tense mouth, of red blood on a white bandage on the sunken, tawny glow of his cheek.

Eddie's chest judders like a failing engine against his own, and Richie's stomach clenches so tightly in hope and disbelief at what he's actually asking for, wondering if Eddie understands.

The Deadlights showed him what could have been. For a moment when he came crashing back from the void, he remembered Ben kissing Beverly awake, so long ago — and there had been Eddie, hunched up above him looking so proud of himself. Richie's heart had skyrocketed, a shadow loomed, and there was no time to ask.

Now Eddie is here, alive and beautiful, his narrow chest intact. He's sallow with lingering exhaustion, and Richie doesn't want to waste another second without him.

*You saved my life, it's yours now.* Helter-skelter thoughts shriek around like a carnival ride spent dreaming Eddie would sit just a little closer, but he doesn't voice them, because Eddie already thinks he's crazy. *Share it with me, take it, have it, it's probably been yours this entire fucking time and that's why nobody else has ever wanted it.*

"I have a gardener," Richie begs him, harder. Shamelessly. *Look at me.* It wouldn't be the first time he'd got on scraped knees to hold Eddie's face and pray he found some kind of salvation in Richie's



eyes. “Bug spray. My whole place is totally insect-free, I swear.”

Eddie’s eyes are screwed shut as he passes a shaking hand over his forehead, furrowed like he’s found a way to make a living worrying about shit. Which, Richie supposes, he has. His wedding ring glints like a lighthouse warning Richie of ruin, but he’s sailing right in. His heart’s on a mutiny.

“Okay,” Eddie whispers eventually, his voice all strangled. “Fuck. God, I want to — I have to — okay.” He looks up at Richie, suddenly that same scrappy kid who was the first to leap down into algae-ridden water to hurl rocks at bullies. Jaw set in attack-dog mode, and Richie so desperately wants to be attacked.

It seems to Richie like Eddie found something new down below Neibolt, shining proudly out of every pore as he knelt over Richie, his back turned like a shield to the horror. *I fucking told you, you’re braver than you think.*

Seems to Richie like he wants to see what he can do with it.

“I’ll come,” Eddie says. “For — for a while. Maybe until Thanksgiving? I can take some leave from work. But only because of the bug spray, I know the kinds of fucking spiders you get over there.”

Derry’s silent that night. Sometimes the biggest changes come the quietest, muffled deep under a town, or inside a ribcage.

“Yeah,” Richie breathes, feeling knocked-down stupid happy, his heart tentatively soaring. “For the bug spray.”

Eddie’s smile is fleeting and knowing, his dimples coming out like stars.

Richie tips his head back against the door, blows out a shaky breath and sends a prayer of thanks to something he doesn’t believe in, because this feels like a miracle.

Nine months. Nine months of Eddie commuting back to New York for

fraught divorce proceedings, nine months of his stuff recorded on Richie's TiVo, of his anal-as-fuck closet organizational system and his extensive floss collection worming its way into Richie's en-suite.

L.A. is still hot on Thanksgiving. Eddie complains about it constantly in the days before the other Losers visit, and Richie only grows more certain with every passing day that he's completely *fucked*, because all it does it make him want to kiss Eddie more. Within an inch of his demanding, bossy, hilarious life.

They don't kiss for the first six of those nine months. At first Richie assumes it's because of Eddie's ex, or the way Eddie still can't even say the word gay.

It's easier than Richie could have ever expected, to slot into each other's lives the way they do. Of course, Eddie's the one doing a lot more slotting; he moved right across the goddamn country.

Richie has panic attacks about it, fairly often. Paces around his bedroom until he has to curl up and jam his face hard into a pillow, hands clamped around his ears as his breath pummels out. He doesn't let Eddie know, because that would only freak him out too, make him drive like the maniac he is to the nearest Walgreens and rack up a gigantic Valium bill to the account he'd opened his first week in California. Or maybe it would only crumble Eddie's resolve into dust, if Richie shows him exactly how petrified he is of this not *working*.

If he sees what a tangled mess Richie is over him, he might just cut his losses and move back to New York. Too much effort, the way everyone in Richie's life since the faded idyll of the Losers has always found him too much fucking effort.

It's not that being a minor celebrity of moderate means (albeit a sloppy, single one in his forties) is a bad life. At least, Richie never used to think so. But that was before he had a *friend*, a true friend. Now he has five. But even back then, within the little solar system of the Loser's Club, Richie always liked to think that he and Eddie had

their own personal orbit around each other, neither one of them the moon to a bigger, more important planet. Just two, weird little asteroids, sharing comics and talking into the firefly-speckled nights until their throats hurt. And in Richie's case, wanting something so huge and unnameable that he was sure it was better to hang in agonizing limbo, than to risk either Eddie's disgust, or the humiliating knowledge that Eddie thought about him the way he thought about Eddie.

*You're my best friend*, Richie thinks, as he trails around the grocery store in Eddie's scurrying wake, slumped over the handles of the cart. They take longer than they really need to, because the A/C is stronger here than at home, but it's fine. Richie watches the bounce of the fanny-pack Eddie *still* wears, the slap of his sandals on linoleum as he lectures Richie happily about the health benefits of blueberries. The sweet, skinny curve of his calf muscles, the knot of his ankle bone. *I didn't know how lonely I was.*

*You're my best friend*, Richie thinks, dejectedly, *and if you love me the way I love you, we might ruin it. I can't lose you. I wish we'd never lost each other in the first place.*

But Eddie came to California. He stepped off the plane looking as anxious as ever, even gave Richie a hug in the arrivals at LAX. He actually cooks dinner most nights, skilled at it from years spent constructing fussy meals around his many dietary requirements. He whoops like a frat boy when he slaughters Richie at the ping-pong table he keeps in his garage, both of them dripping with sweat and laughing the way you only can with someone for whom you'd face down literal death. Twice.

It all has to *mean* something.

As the weeks wear on Richie starts to wake up every day with a frigid stone in his stomach, wondering if maybe he'd got this all wrong, that Eddie is really just his new roommate and nothing more. The revelatory shine of having Eddie back in his life feels like it will never wear off, but Richie still can't help but hope for more, and more, and more.

Then he invariably comes through to the kitchen to find Eddie's

clothes neat and his hair sleep-rumpled, catches his eye and soaks in Eddie's shy morning grin like it's the California sun itself. A healthy fruit salad waiting for him, because Eddie is genuinely worried he'll get scurvy. He stretches and pours himself some orange juice, some of the good local shit they'd bought at the farmer's market, and watches the way Eddie's sleepy eyes will trail down into the waistband of his boxers. The resulting blush only brings out the shadows where Eddie hasn't shaved yet, and Richie will have to excuse himself before he does something stupid to shatter the tentative calm they've achieved.

When he actually lets himself think about it, there are a hundred other little moments like that, individual puzzle pieces coming together to make something Richie can hardly believe.

It's how close Eddie sits on the couch when they catch up on all the kickass movies they've missed out on seeing together for over twenty years. Two tired, dysfunctional peas in a faux-leather pod, sharing popcorn. Richie hardly hears any dialogue, his heart pounding painfully in his ears whenever Eddie's arm brushes his own into a goosebumpy wreck, or their fingers meet in the bowl. Eddie's hand takes longer and longer to move away every time.

It's Eddie's lowered eyes and his small, murmured, "It's okay, Rich," whenever Richie forgets himself and puts his hand against Eddie's hip to move past him in the kitchen, yanking it back like he's been scalded when he realizes what he's doing. There are *boundaries*, or at least there always were when they ran around as Derry-savage kids. You can give your friend a noogie, but you'd better watch your fucking back if your hands turn anything softer than violent. Nah, there aren't *enough* boundaries in Richie's nighttime, mood-lit house, just the two of them angled together like magnetic poles straining against physics to meet.

*It's okay, Rich.*

What is? Nothing Richie feels is okay, the huge aching hole in his stomach as he lies in bed at night after Christmas Day, still feeling the phantom sensation of Eddie's long, tight hug, when Richie presented him with his own key to the house.

His fingers are bitten bloody with nerves, and they shake as he hands

it over, no matter how hard he tries to play it cool. Eddie gives him a shining stack of tokens for the arcade at Santa Monica.

“You looked like it really meant something, back in Derry,” Eddie says, his hands twisting together around his key. “Your totem, I mean. You always spent way too much fucking time in the Aladdin, I used to think you liked Street Fighter more than — than us.”

“Oh no, I did,” Richie says, cradling the tokens. There’s a lump in his throat, like he’s swallowed one of the coins. “*Way* more than you, Eds, are you kidding?”

Eddie grins, his wide pupils and the ragged line of his healing scar glowing different colors in the single string of Christmas lights they’d hung around the living room, and Richie has to get up for more eggnog to stop feeling like he needs to breathe into a paper bag.

He knows what will fill the hole in his gut, and it sure as hell ain’t holiday cookies.

It’s daily agony. It’s almost no better than being sixteen again, made of skin and bone and hormones and cycling as far out into the woods as he dared to on his own, to scream and shatter sticks on rocks. As if that would exorcise some of his terrible feelings about coltish legs in too-short shorts, giddy insults aimed at him in a puberty-cracked voice, or a flat, asthmatic chest.

But at the same time, it all feels promising. All the lingering looks Eddie gifts him, like he’s trying to figure something out and wouldn’t really mind if Richie helped.

Richie will wait for however long Eddie wants, and forever after that.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

it’s\_happening\_stay\_calm.gif

I’ll be updating pretty regularly as I have the vast majority of this written already, I just got sick of staring at the first few dozen chapters without publishing anything

also I'm scottish and ive never been to LA or california, so sorry for any inaccuracies. I HAVE seen a ton of movies, and been to florida a bunch of times, which is basically the same thing, right guys? right???

## 2. Chapter 2

Eddie still doesn't know how to dress for the January heat. They go for walks around the neighborhood or on drives along Sunset, the car's top down and Eddie's armpits ringed in dark sweat. His good-boy haircut unsticking itself to hang over his forehead, and every time he catches Richie looking helplessly over at him, his scowl fidgets into a smile.

The air itself presses in on them like trench-deep water, makes Richie go sluggish and lose his appetite. He still lets Eddie buy them blue-corn tacos, once Eddie neurotically determines there's nothing in it to give him a reaction. Night dips sodium orange and smoky purple into Beverly Hills the first time Eddie looks around them on one of their walks and takes Richie's hand abruptly, like a pod bursting open with pressure to release tender, fragile seeds.

The whining insects and ticking sprinkler systems aren't enough to drown out Eddie's voice though, low and apologetic. "I just need time, Rich, I promise."

Richie's pulse goes supersonic. His throat closes so tight with emotion that his next breath comes out in a mortifying squeak, like air from a balloon.

He chances a sideways peek as they pass under a streetlight, but Eddie turns scarlet and looks away as soon as their eyes meet.

His hand is smaller than Richie's, but just as sweaty. Blunt nailed, fine-knuckled, and it's his right one, so Richie's scar is probably tickling his palm. A little rougher from the twenty-seven intervening years since Richie felt like puking his guts out to make room for the thrill of grabbing Eddie's bird-bone hand in his, so eager to drag him wherever they were going that day.

It's the same hand. The same *Eddie*, gnawing his lower lip and glancing wide-eyed at Richie every so often as if to check he's still being stared at. And he is, because now that this is actually fucking happening, Richie's pretty sure he's incapable of looking at anything else.

He swallows the lump in his throat, so he can grin like he wants to.

Every bone in his hand is electrified, as he feels Eddie's fingers nestle into the gaps between his own. It spreads up his arm, through his whole body, until he's sure his entire skeleton must be lit up like a Halloween decoration. For once in his life he can't *spea*k. All he can do is let out a breathless laugh, harder still when Eddie knocks their shoulders together and stares at the sidewalk, blushing furiously, their hands hot and swinging between them.

Richie's stomach rolls in giddy circles, like a kid on his first date. Which it might as well be, as far as he's concerned. He wants to go back and rewrite history, scratch Eddie's initials into his heart as his first date, his first kiss, his first *everything*, the way he always should have been.

Shrouded in inky twilight, they don't let go of one another until Richie has to unlock the front door, and the bats flitting overhead like ashy embers in the hot night breeze are the only ones who know a goddamn thing about it.

In his room he is dark, burning, and alone, and he thinks that it must feel kinda like this at the center of the Earth. Or in the middle of the Big Bang, surrounded by the potential for something enormous. He goes to sleep cradling his scarred hand close to his chest.

A couple of weeks into February, Eddie comes marching out of his room to block the view of where Richie is cultivating a pretty mean kill-streak, sunk so low into the sticky couch he feels like that dense lump of nuclear disaster, rotting down into Chernobyl's basement.

"Richie, c'mon. Let's go out to eat, I'm starving."

"Hold on, Eds, I'm — can't we just get take-out? I'm kinda busy here. Achievements to get."

Technically he has material to write, but hey.

"I beat your high score yesterday, actually, so you don't need to bother. C'mon, I'm paying."



“That was *you*? I thought the thing fucking glitched, I spent an hour re-installing it!”

Richie tosses his controller aside in disgust and finally looks up at Eddie, outrage dissipating in a wisp of smoke when he gets a good look at him. Hair combed within an inch of its life, a muscle ticking in his jaw. Even his shoes are shiny.

“Why are you wearing a tie? Are we going to eat at a funeral home?”

The pink flush disappears under Eddie’s stiff-looking white collar, and he stuffs his hands into his pockets. Richie’s suddenly desperate to see how far down it goes. All-too-familiar longing twists a corkscrew in his chest until it feels like his heart will pop out in a fizz of champagne.

Eddie’s staring hard at his feet. “Shut up, I just — come on? Please?”

It’s the *please* that does it, the beseeching wobble in Eddie’s smile. He was always a terror as a kid when he and Richie got going, but New York has made Eddie even less polite than him. It’s normally incredibly funny, but Richie kind of never wants Eddie to feel like he has to ask for anything. Not now. Even though Richie would pull his own arm off if Eddie said he needed a back-scratcher. He stands up so fast he gets head-rush, and slopes along in Eddie’s shadow towards the front door, brushing away Dorito dust from his shirt and trying not to be obvious about ogling Eddie’s ass in his smart slacks.

“Do I have to change?”

Eddie stops fumbling with his car keys long enough to look him up and down, slowly, until Richie feels squirmy with it. His gaze is like the unseasonable forest fires that are plaguing the state, burning Richie up from his feet to the top of his head.

“No.” Eddie clears his throat. “No, you’re good. It’s just dinner, Rich. Hurry your ass up, we’ll be late.”

He’s being *weird*. Richie doesn’t argue when Eddie says he’s driving, since he obviously has a destination in mind, and since it gives him ample opportunity to stare at the side of Eddie’s face, clean-shaven

and still looking pinkly embarrassed as he rambles about mundane shit like the weather and how hungry he is. He almost misses the usual intense G-force he gets whenever Eddie takes corners, but tonight he's actually driving like he gives a damn about who's in the car, even if his knuckles are white on the wheel. It's funny. For a risk analyst, Eddie drives like he's doing everyone else on the road a favor by not immediately ramming into them.

Richie keeps staring at him, amusement climbing higher as they park. Eddie gives his name quietly to the bored-looking teenager at the front desk, who then leads them to a table somewhere near the back.

"What?" Eddie says once they're settled, smoothing non-existent creases in the tablecloth. If his eyes get any wider and darker they're gonna swallow his face.

Richie's pretty sure his cheeks are getting cramp from grinning so hard. "Dude, you made reservations? At *Olive Garden*?"

A couple a few tables over laughs together, and Eddie startles, chewing hard at the inside of his mouth. "Yes? So? I like Italian, Richie, fuckin' sue me."

"You lived in New York and you think Olive Garden is Italian?"

Eddie kicks him under the table, smirking when Richie gives him the finger in return. "Stop being an L.A. asshole and pick some wine. I'm taking a piss."

Richie chortles to himself as he watches Eddie leave. It's quiet, being that it's a Monday night in goddamn February, just a few families in tight groups under the lurid decorations. As ever, the place looks like if Mickey Mouse ate an entire authentic pizzeria and then vomited it back out. Richie squints, pushing his glasses further up his nose for a better look instead of examining the menu, because the decor looks even more garish than usual.

It's — strings of little hearts, draped around the walls. Red ones. Obviously nobody's taken them down yet, even though Valentine's Day was—

The roof of his mouth feels itchy all of a sudden, tasting metallic as his throat dries up in a rush of adolescent excitement, so huge it's humiliating. He looks furtively around for prank show cameras. Surely everyone can feel the flushed heat rolling off him, they're gonna have to crank the A/C higher than it already is, higher than it should have to be in winter. His stomach flips around like it's doing gymnastics, and he takes a few gulps of water. Mostly just for something to do with his hands, as he watches Eddie ease back down into his chair, his tie slightly looser. Like he's been looking at himself in the bathroom mirror and decided it was a little too much for... this. Whatever this is.

Richie stares at him again, because how could he ever stop? Eddie keeps glancing at him with these little half-smiles, and *God*, he's so cute. Looking like it's Sunday School, which is bizarre, given how enthusiastically he's recently converted to wearing sleeveless shirts. Richie feels like an idiot in his own cargo shorts and tropical-patterned monstrosity.

"Uh," he says intelligently, into the silence. Breathing steadily through the flocks of butterflies in his chest is a lot of effort, turns out.

"The uh, the bathrooms are kinda gross, and I forgot hand sanitizer. If you know any better places, we can go somewhere else another time, I mean, it's your neighborhood, but I thought it should be a — a surprise." Eddie's babbling. He's hunched over with his arms tucked between his legs, not looking at Richie. The low restaurant light makes the tips of his ears look a rich, dark red, like the wine Richie's too stunned to have ordered yet. "I've got my gluten thing, but I know you like the breadsticks here, and—"

"Eds, what day is it?"

Eddie's jaw snaps shut with a click. The condensation is refreshingly cool, when Richie rubs his thumb down his water glass, and by God, he needs it.

"Hm?"

"What's the date?"

Eddie cringes, and runs one unsteady hand over his already smoothed-down hair. "It's, uh, the fifteenth."

Richie leans back in his chair, chewing a smile around his thumbnail, and the view looks good from the top of the world. Eddie Kaspbrak blushing like a tomato, and staring back at him like Richie's a grenade about to go off.

Richie pulls the pin, and gives him a wink. "Yeah, I thought so."

A tiny laugh shudders its way out of Eddie, guttering the candle between them. He takes a big drink from his own water, mumbling something into the glass Richie can't hear.

"What was that? You gotta speak up, all these doves are singing pretty loud."

"Fucking hell," Eddie bites out, but one corner of his mouth is twitching down at the table. "Said, get whatever you want, I'm paying. Remember? I'll even help you take your shoes off later, if you get drunk. One time deal."

"In that case, I'm aiming for liver damage." He thumps his fist on the table, making Eddie jump and the cutlery rattle. "Ah, where ees zat garçon, what does a man 'ave to do to get fucking 'ammered in zis town?"

"You're such a dumbass," Eddie sighs, sounding far fonder than Richie's sure he'd ever admit to.

Richie leans forward, feeling tipsy already. "Are you wearing cologne? Can I sniff you?"

"I think I'll have the steak," Eddie announces from where he's hiding behind the menu, loud enough that the nearby couple looks over at them.

His foot bumps into Richie's under the table, which might be an accident, but the way their hands tangle together in the dark parking lot on the way back to the car certainly isn't. And neither is the warm grip Richie feels on the back of his knee when Eddie helps him take his shoes off, sliding a little ways up the leg of his shorts. The sense-

memory of it lingers for the rest of the night, and sends Richie into the happiest drunken sleep of his life.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

in the book, Richie does in fact live in Beverly Hills. you wanna know the level of research i did for one bonkers inconsequential detail? i looked up which olive garden would be closest to their house and THEN looked at the menu to make sure there was a gluten free option for eddie lmfao what IS THIS

thank you for all the nice comments so far on the first chapter! they're sustaining my very life. i'm [@skinks](#) on tumblr, as always

### 3. Chapter 3

They kiss for the first time in the middle of the night, in March.

Richie gets up for a glass of water, ice cold from his giant refrigerator and a nice counterpoint to the cool terracotta kitchen tiles under his bare feet. Something hurts his half-shut eyes, and he notices the patio light is on. Swarming with bugs. The door sliding open has Eddie startling out of the deck chair he'd claimed for himself, clutching at his chest.

*"Jesus* Richie, you trying to give me a stroke?"

"Nah," he says. "Just keeping you on your toes. You gotta have reflexes out here, Eds, those spiders can come outta nowhere. Not to mention the snakes."

Eddie draws his feet up quickly onto the chair. "That's not funny, asshole."

"It's a little funny," Richie says, grinning at him like a lunatic, probably. Maybe Eddie didn't want company, but Richie can't help himself.

Even so many months in, it's still taking some getting used to, having Eddie around every day. Talking about their lives since Derry, all the movies they both like, laughing themselves sick. Like being fourteen again in an endless stretch of heat-swollen summer, un-plagued by the terror of It. Back when the weight of his feelings for Eddie could only be lifted by carving his love into something permanent, a great big *fuck you all* to the town. You can take the boy out of Derry, but he's sure as shit gonna leave a mark.

"What are you doing up, man? It's like three in the morning..."

Eddie looks at him, wide eyed with his mouth twisting in that way it does when he's trying to work up some nerve. Richie's heart drops a little because — Eddie hasn't ever needed nerve around him, always

has the balls to say whatever he's thinking. Maybe this is it. Maybe his bags are packed.

But Eddie only swings his legs around until he's mirroring Richie on the other chair. "I saw your interview on Conan. Earlier tonight, I mean."

Ah, *fuck*.

"Y-you saw that?"

"Yeah."

"The whole thing?"

Eddie rolls his eyes, but there's a grin tugging up the corners of his mouth. "Yes, the whole fuckin' thing."

The taping had been a week or so back. His publicist seemed to think it was the right time, his first talk-show appearance since his offhand coming-out post on Instagram. It wasn't supposed to be a big deal; say something relatable about being himself, setting an example. He'd wanted to test out some jokes, something trite about doubling his dating pool, but Eddie's brow darkened like a thundercloud when he'd suggested it. And — well. He isn't ashamed to admit to himself that he's already whipped.

Stan's letters to both of them had come in the mail that morning. He'd read his in the car over to the studio, and had to ask the driver to cruise around the block so he could take some time to stop crying.

*Be who you want to be. Be proud.*

Stanley probably knew about the two of them before they did. Old before his time. He saw everything with those clunky-ass bird binoculars of his.

God, Richie misses him.

The words were still fresh in his mind when the question came out of

nowhere, Conan blindsiding him against publicist orders.

“So, now that you’re out, and very happy about it, it seems — as you should be — is there anyone special in your life? We all know you like to make jokes about eternal singlehood.”

“Well—”

“Your dating pool has *doubled*, it seems.”

A few voices whooped in the stalls, some of them undeniably male.

“Oh man,” Richie laughed, and so did the audience. He was sweating like crazy, and not just because of the lights, blinding him to the crowd and maybe to good judgement.

But, Stan...

*If you find someone worth holding on to, never, ever let them go.*

“Yeah, y’know. There is someone. We’ve, uh, known each other a long time, and — fuck it. He’s never gonna see this, he hates this show.” The audience laughed again, as Richie grinned. It was true.

“He’s the funniest person I know. He’s not, like, comedian funny though, y’know, he’s never *trying* to make anyone laugh? Like, the other day I was trying to convince him the Fresno Nightcrawlers are real, and — Google ‘em — and he said — didn’t even look up, he just said *yeah Richie, I’ve seen the videos, you think I don’t know what you look like when you’re shitfaced?*”

Richie slapped at his knee, his ungainly snorts setting the audience off again as a photo made its way onto the media feed, clear on the studio screens.

“He said you looked like one of those?”

“Yeah!”

“But that’s so mean!”

“It’s the best! He made me eat a zucchini and it, like, Benjamin



Buttoned the fuck outta me. You guys remember that movie? I have new bones now, it's — it's the best. I'm really happy, man. I couldn't have done all this alone."

Now Eddie sits opposite him. One side of his face lit yellow by the stoop light, the other dancing neon in reflections from the pool.

It's still hot as hell in the middle of the night, though it's the heat that's like a blanket rather than having your body pressed to a griddle. Eddie's in the pair of underwear he obviously uses as pajamas, and something that Richie realizes with a jolting rush is one of his own obnoxious Hawaiian shirts. It's huge on Eddie, drapes past his elbows and down his bare chest like a curtain of hibiscus vines.

*Christ* almighty. Eddie peers at him with his hands dangling, clasped between his bony knees. One leg jiggling in a nervous dance. Flip-flops and socks. He's a dweeb, and Richie loves him so fucking much.

"I'm sorry I talked about you on TV? In my defense, I didn't mention you by name. For all you know I was talking about Bill. Or Mike. Or —"

"Richie—"

"Or Oliver."

Oliver is their next door neighbor's Dalmatian, who they both love to death and pretend not to. Even Eddie, who still screams when Oliver jumps at him.

"*Richie*," Eddie snorts, kicking him gently in the shin. "Shut up, Jesus. We're having a mature conversation about this."

"Maybe you are," Richie mumbles, flushed and embarrassed. God, please don't let it all be a giant mistake.

A car alarm wails to life, a few streets away. It takes a couple minutes for someone to turn it off, and for Eddie to meet his eyes again.

"You know, I only ever kissed one person," Eddie says, quietly.

Richie's heart turns over in his chest, his eyes hanging on Eddie's stoic mouth, one built for nagging and insults and laughing like a hyena at all of Richie's worst jokes. "And I never — it always seemed so pointless. I never wanted it to go anywhere. It wasn't her fault, but I'd find myself thinking about the things she'd just said, or tasting the food she'd eaten, or wondering when I was gonna feel the way everyone talked about, and—"

He stops, fiddling with his left ring finger. The California sun has browned out any trace of the pale band of skin, despite Eddie's excessive use of suncream. He always did tan nicely, even when they were kids.

"One person, and I never once enjoyed it," Eddie says again, almost to himself. "I wish it had been you."

Richie finally takes a breath, his hands shaking where they're clutching his knees.

"I do, too. Jeeze, Eds, I used to think about kissing you so much I couldn't concentrate in school."

Eddie snorts again, dropping his eyes from Richie's with an abashed grin. "Sure, *that* was the reason."

"The *main* reason."

Crickets chirp from the far end of the backyard, droning along with the endless flights blinking overhead. "*Used to*, then," Eddie says to the ground, his big brown eyes melancholy.

"Huh?"

"You said you *used* to think about it."

Richie heaves a dramatic sigh, leaning back on his hands so he can kick his legs out, calves bracketing Eddie's. The touch is scalding, his skin hypersensitive to the hair on Eddie's legs brushing his.

It's okay. He knows Eddie still balks at taking matters like these into his own hands sometimes. The dream-hot press of the night feels liminal enough, unreal enough that Richie doesn't mind picking up

on Eddie's clumsy lead. "Do you get a kick out of being obtuse? C'mon Eddie, you watched the show."

"Well, I don't know! You might've got tired of waiting or something, I'd get it."

"I've waited pretty much my whole life for you, man. A little more isn't gonna kill me." Richie leans across, snags one of Eddie's hands to slide their palms together. "And even if you don't... well. I literally don't care. I'm happy here with you, like this."

Eddie chuckles quietly, and it sounds wet. He rubs his thumb gently over the webbing between Richie's thumb and forefinger, and it's the most erotic thing Richie's ever felt, sends shivers right up his arm.

"You'd suffer lifelong blue balls for me?" Eddie asks. "Your dick would fall off. It'd be like the opposite of frostbite."

"I don't like the sound of that, honestly."

"Me neither."

"Well then," Richie says, feeling giddy all over again. It's like they're on the edge of a precipice, with the Earth itself beckoning them down to where they belong. "I'm ready when you are."

There, permission granted. Landing strip lit up like Reno. Eddie's brave enough to do something about it, he's proven that in spades since Derry.

Eddie looks wholly terrified when he puts his hand to Richie's knee first, their forearms brushing. The tips of his fingers walk slow up Richie's thigh, and he already wants to die, because even that smallest touch has blood swooping down his spine to thicken him a little in his shorts. Suddenly he's extremely glad he put on his glasses when he woke up, because there isn't a chance in hell he'd miss this. Eddie's mouth parted so small, a little damp with how he keeps nervously swiping his tongue over his lower lip. His pulse jumping in his throat.

"Eds," Richie says, hushed, when they're barely inches apart, the deck chairs creaking. "I gotta warn you."

“What?” Eddie’s head is tilted slightly, his eyes lidded and his breath shaky against Richie’s face. In the synth-wavering light from the pool, he looks hypnotized.

“I had Mexican for dinner, and I haven’t brushed my teeth.”

“What the *fuck*,” Eddie yelps, jerking back and looking horrified. It has the effect Richie wanted, breaking the tension as he cackles, clutching his stomach with one hand and clinging to Eddie’s arm with the other.

“I’m *kidding*,” he says. Eddie’s glaring at him, but his hand has settled quickly back on Richie’s thigh, like he can’t help wanting it there. “Just loosening you up, y’know? Tension is bad for kissing.”

Eddie sets his jaw, and *fuck yeah*, this is what Richie wanted. There’s that same determined spark in his eye, one that always preceded him hiking his tiny ass into the hammock alongside Richie like he belonged there, wedged between his legs. Or when he was about to wipe the floor with Richie at loogie-hawking, bubble-gum blowing, or bearing him down into the cut-limp browning grass of the park to wrestle, until Eddie shrieked with laughter and forgot he was supposed to have allergies.

Richie is knocked back a little with the force of the kiss when it comes, and it’s bad, it’s a bad kiss, closed-mouthed and too hard and it’s the best fucking thing Richie’s ever felt in his life. His hands fly out to fit against Eddie’s bare ribs, steadying him where he’s awkwardly half in Richie’s lap already. Eddie’s hands are hot, branding his jaw where they’re cupping his face like Richie’s water in a desert. Their heads tilt and their mouths slip open, and suddenly it’s better, the hot little noise Eddie makes when Richie presses his tongue to the seam of his lips has his heart about to burst right out of his chest.

“I don’t care,” Eddie gasps against his mouth. He’s burning in Richie’s arms, quivering like he’s got hypothermia. Richie’s shaking so much it could just be him. “I hate you. You’re not funny. You coulda had shit for dinner and I’d still wanna kiss you.”

Richie tugs him closer by the lapels of his own fucking shirt, and

Eddie smells of the bug spray he must've doused himself with to sit out here, to come out west and live in Richie's house, in his clothes. "That's gross, Eds," he says, instead of saying *I love you too*. He dives in for another kiss, sloppy now because he wants to taste nothing but the inside of Eddie's mouth for the rest of his life.

*This is my first kiss*, he thinks wildly, *my life was on hold without you*.

"You're gross," Eddie mutters, his voice thick like he's drunk, and he kisses Richie again, and kisses him, and kisses him.

Sirens peal in the dark distance like they always do, and maybe it's for him, Richie rushed to hospital because he's died and gone to heaven. Eddie's squirming against him with one knee pressed beside Richie's hip, panting and licking into each other's mouths, breathing harsh through their noses. Fingers tight in Richie's hair. Then Richie greedily pushes his hands up under the billowing shirt, feeling the smooth, beloved skin of Eddie's narrow back and down under his sensible boxers to squeeze his ass, and Eddie is breaking the kiss to back off.

He falls back heavily into the other chair, away from Richie's hands, suddenly bereft.

"I'm sorry—"

"Eds, I'm—"

"Richie no, it's — you didn't do anything wrong, I'm just—" Eddie's chest is heaving, flushed dark all up his neck to his face, staring at Richie in shock.

Richie can sympathize. He's been knocked completely out of orbit, into a galaxy new and wonderful. He touches his lips, feels them wet from Eddie's tongue. Feels like fainting.

His throat clicks in a dry-stalk rattle when he swallows, hoping the dark umbrella palms overhead are enough to hide his boner in shadow. It's a little embarrassing, popping a stiffy from some kissing at his age, but it's a culmination of everything he wanted to do at thirteen, fourteen, *fifteensixteenseventeen* and watching his best friend

swim half-naked in the glittering quarry. Wracked with guilt and the certainty that his spine and his whole world would dissolve like hot sugar, if Eddie ever looked back.

“Maybe that’s enough for one night,” he says, his own voice hoarse and unrecognizable.

“Yeah,” Eddie says, smoothing down the creases in Richie’s shirt, made crumpled by a death-grip. His hands are trembling. “Yeah. Fuck. That was, uh — wow. Goodnight, Richie.”

He stands to go inside, and he looks so goddamn messy and gorgeous in the flickering glow that Richie has to catch his hand, press a quick kiss to the sweat-salty knuckles.

Eddie smiles at him crookedly, and heads indoors.

Richie drains his forgotten glass of water, and spends a long time sitting there, looking up. Light pollution blots out the majority of the stars, but that night he feels like he can see every single one.

It’s like a dam breaking.

They make out everywhere, all over the house. It’s a little ridiculous, but Richie reasons to himself that they’re only making up for time they’re owed by the universe or whatever, so he’s not about to complain. Eddie is surprisingly forthcoming, shoving him up against the fridge, the doors when they pass each other in the hallway. Pushing his tongue down Richie’s throat, ‘til Richie’s whimpering and his hands cramp from clenching around Eddie’s hips. It’s almost like he wants to practice, and his technique is definitely improving. He braces one hand on the countertops and groans so loud when Richie can’t stand looking at him any longer, swimming in sweatpants rolled up at the ankles and an endless rotation of Richie’s big shirts, and pushes him there, cooking abandoned, to bite marks low on his throat, shallow enough that they won’t show in the morning. One memorable evening he lets Richie boost him up beside the vegetables Eddie *insists* they eat, threading his hands into Richie’s hair where he’s half-collapsed in the vee of Eddie’s thighs, groping.

Richie's late to work more times than he can count. Eddie will come stomping out of his own office in the mornings (his work easily transferred from New York, because *there's more than enough risk to keep me employed, Rich, I've seen the way you fuckers drive out here*) yanking Richie down against him in the garage, and Richie will spend the hellish L.A. commute in a daze, thinking of Eddie's sly grin against his mouth and the feel of his leg winding around Richie's thigh.

His dick develops a Pavlovian response to the minty sting of toothpaste. It's a fucking disaster.

The weather doesn't help. He wakes up and the bleached horizon is already shimmering at eight in the morning, Richie half sure he's causing it himself. He feels white-hot for far more of the day than can be healthy, a fevered anticipation fizzing over his skin every time Eddie gets close, buttoned up in his cute little polos.

Things never go further than a lot of heated heavy-petting, Eddie cringing away with apologies spilling forth whenever Richie forgets, reaches down to feel the hardness between Eddie's legs. It's like a drug. He feels terrible, because the last thing he wants to do is push. But it's the mere fact that it's *Eddie*, his neurotic, pain-in-the-ass friend who was terrified of porno mags, here with his pupils blown to black holes and his cock clearly as up for it as Richie's, well—

It's a lot. And he feels like he's going insane. It's been six months of cohabitation and he's still never even seen Eddie's dick.

Eddie's seen *his* dick plenty. Richie likes to skinny-dip in his own pool, so sue him. Soon he learns to appreciate the oppressive afternoon stillness, for the way he keeps spotting Eddie staring at him pink-faced over the top of his book, when he's floating around.

Splashing him only earns Richie a sandal flung at his head, so he doesn't do it. Much.

One of the first things Eddie did, when it was clear this was more than just an extended vacation, was find a therapist. Richie had once suggested they go to couple's therapy, covering his real question and the fact that his stomach was in knots by couching it as a joke.

But Eddie had only scoffed, said, “We don’t need any. We’re a fuckin’ awesome couple.”

Then he wouldn’t stop laughing at Richie, who had buried his face, hot and overwhelmed, into his arms folded on the table.

Turns out defeating a monster clown, moving across country to do gay shit with your long-lost best friend, on *top* of the stuff Eddie had festering away inside himself since he was a kid; it takes more than a couple of sessions to work out. Something like psychosomatic asthma doesn’t just go away overnight.

Richie considers going himself, but... he’s just an asshole. He’d be defrauding someone out of a real patient, and himself out of hundreds of dollars. Nobody ever emotionally abused him, made him think he was sick when he wasn’t, why waste money just to say *I spent thirty years hating myself enough to make a career out of it, and I’m scared that I don’t know how to stop. I don’t know who I am if I like myself. I have occasional bouts of a superiority complex so huge that I don’t feel the need to impress anyone, so people think I’m a shithead anyway. I’m scared to be someone he can’t love, regardless.*

Why waste the money.

One of the thousandth things Eddie did was start running, much to Richie’s horrified delight.

“You *run*?”

“Yeah, numbnuts, I run. What’s it to ya?” Eddie huffs, pulling on his adorable sneakers.

“You, Eddie Kaspbrak, *run*?”

He’s wearing tiny red running shorts, his legs lean and golden in the buttery sunlight of Richie’s entranceway. The dark, soft looking hair on his shins goes *all the way up*. Richie’s stupid expensive watch must be broken, because it’s telling him the date is April 17th, instead of Christmas.

“I hated it in New York, too many fucking people on the sidewalks. But the gyms here are a ripoff and this neighborhood is quiet. Plus,



running is good for my blood pressure, dumbass.”

“Well, God knows that needs bringing down a notch or two.”

Eddie flips him off, grinning as he tucks his keys and inhaler into his fanny-pack (*it's an athletic accessory now, Rich, you're just pissed that I'm finally fashionable*), and swings the door open. He turns at the bottom of the steps, marches back up to leave Richie dizzy with a kiss not fit to be seen by the neighbors.

“Bye babe!” Richie yells, and then goes back inside to jerk off to the sight of Eddie’s ass jogging away from him in those shorts, down the long driveway.

He hasn’t masturbated this much since high school. It’s torture.

It only gets worse, starting from the night Eddie moves unceremoniously into Richie’s bedroom with him.

They’re watching a movie, and then *not* watching it for the past thirty minutes, ever since Richie pulls a move he’s always wanted to. Eddie snorts when Richie’s arm drapes itself out of a subtle stretch, along the back of his shoulders.

“Really?”

“Is it working?”

“Nope,” Eddie says, but Richie can see his mouth twitching. Plus, he’s side-eyeing Richie instead of the screen.

“Bummer,” Richie replies, nosing into Eddie’s hair. Eddie’s cheek is rough with the day’s stubble when Richie kisses him there, lingering, and *fuck* if it doesn’t still drive him crazy. That he somehow managed to wind up here, twenty years later with the boy of his dreams grown into a man who might just love him back.

They end up tangled deep into the couch, with the movie playing unheeded in the background. It’s some cheesy horror Eddie picked, but even the screaming and grotesque sound effects aren’t enough to distract Richie from the blazing heat of their bellies stuck together, slick with sweat where they’ve rucked up their shirts in the midst of

things.

The air-con is blasting to cope with the early summer night, bearing down on them from outside. Richie had been starting to get kinda chilly, but it's alleviated when Eddie ends up sprawled all over him, moaning into the kiss as his hips twitch forward into Richie's erection. His dick is on a hair-trigger these days. Sometimes all it takes is groggily hugging Eddie good morning to have him sporting a half-chub in his pajama pants.

He's really, *really* fucked.

He palms over the shifting muscle of Eddie's lower back, kneading tightly at the neat swell of his ass. This is allowed now, Eddie is cool with ass-touching, if not much else beyond that. Richie doesn't mind, really. All that running does wonders. But then his thigh nudges up too urgently between Eddie's legs, and he's moving away again.

"Okay, let's — Richie c'mon, let's go to bed."

Eddie's slowly disengaging himself, scrubbing his hands through his hair until it's even more sexed-up than it was. He reaches down to adjust the bulge in his shorts. It takes a moment for the words to sink through the horny fog in Richie's brain.

"To — to bed?"

"To sleep," Eddie says hurriedly. He folds his arms, bare and streaked with dumbass tan lines as they are in the pale blue tank he's wearing. "I still can't, Rich, I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Richie says, still feeling kiss-stupid. Eddie wants to sleep with him. In his bed. He's assaulted with images of *cuddling*, for God's sakes, inexplicable butterflies hatching in his chest. "That sounds great, Spaghetti Man. I'm tired anyway."

The grateful look Eddie shoots him is worth it, and that's the first night Richie lies awake, listening to Eddie fall softly asleep beside him.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

thank you everyone who's been enjoying this so far, I'm on holiday with my family and I hardly have any time to finish writing the final chapter, but reading your lovely comments is keeping me from going insane

i think over the years i've probably watched every bill hader talk-show interview that exists, and it never fails to crack me tf up when he starts laughing at his own stories about people nobody knows. i feel like richie would talk about eddie all the gd time on tv and I Love It

Oliver the Dalmatian belonged to my childhood best friend/neighbour, and he ended up in this story entirely spontaneously. also it took me until maybe halfway through writing this fic to remember americans have air conditioning everywhere fucking rip

[@skinks](#) on tumblr, pls say hi if you like or wanna yell about reddie

## 4. Chapter 4

### Notes for the Chapter:

little quicker update this time since it's a shorter chapter. they only get longer from here on out, dw

Summer comes, and it brings a heatwave.

Tarry fissures open up in the roads, and his feet burn the whole scant distance from the house to the relief of the pool. Even the air slows down to a crawl, and it becomes easy to spend an entire free afternoon lazily watching the shape of Eddie rippling through the condensation sweating down his drink. It's well over a hundred degrees, and they sleep in their underwear with the fan swirling above them, not even touching slightly in the dark. However much they might want to, and *God*, Richie wants to.

And so, nine months later, there's a heatwave in L.A. the first time Richie sees Eddie naked.

Light has him screwing his eyes open unhappily, spearing through the dim murk of his overheated dreams. The bathroom glows in a bright rectangle, and one half of the king-size is empty, a faint shadow of sweat left in the wake.

It only took a handful of nights for Richie to stop holding every muscle corpse-stiff, terrified of accidentally groping something in his sleep and sending Eddie haring back to his old room, disgusted.

Eventually his nerves have settled to a purr, a little more with every time Eddie hip-checks him as they brush their teeth, or every time Richie falls fitfully asleep mid-sentence to the feel of fingertips resting in his curls, as Eddie sits up reading shit on his phone. It's all the contact they can bear, as the hot spell sinks its claws in.

As far as Richie can tell, he's the only one whose sleep is ripped to

pieces by the heat. Eddie's a constant dark, immobile presence at his side whenever he wakes up.

He fumbles for his glasses, suddenly worried.

The toilet flushes quietly, and then there's Eddie slouching to the sink, bare as the day he was born.

Richie's throat catches.

It feels like a slap in the face. It's possible he's still asleep; he's had this dream before, a thousand times.

His dreams are never so real, however, and therefore so perfect. Eddie is as little as always, 5'9" in the way that actually means 5'7" in bare feet. He gets so pissy when Richie has to help him reach the higher shelves at Trader Joe's.

But where Richie is built in weird angles like a praying mantis with a soft belly, Eddie is compact and wiry from the running, his metabolism high from all the goddamn fretting he does. Shoulder blades winging out in neat arcs while he washes his hands. Dimples above his fantastic ass to match his cheeks, even the one notched by the scar of Bowers' knife.

When Eddie turns he's limned in the golden fluorescence of the bathroom light, his whole body and wild tufts of hair in stark profile. The soft, dark mound of him swinging between his legs. Uncut, and gorgeous.

Logically, Richie knows Eddie *has* a dick, he's felt it pressing into his thigh often enough, but the sight of it is thrilling like nothing else. Literal *saliva* floods his mouth, his gut leaping up to the ceiling.

No half-glance in the gym showers, or guilt-ridden peek during high school sleepovers compares to this. Now he knows exactly what he wants, what he *feels*, and he isn't ashamed of it.

Eddie must see him there, pale and gawping in the low light like one of Pennywise's ghouls, because he hisses out a startled, "*Shit*," clattering back into the doorframe with a bang.

"I didn't think you were awake," he says accusingly, bare chest rising and falling.

"The light..."

"Ah, shit. Sorry." Richie sees the moment Eddie must realize he's completely buck nude, because his eyes widen and he scrambles for his boxers, which Richie hadn't seen, folded neatly on the chair.

He grins like a maniac, watching Eddie hop around as he tugs them on. "You're sleeping full pussy out and letting me sweat my balls off over here? How long has this been going on, I'm truly hurt."

"Most nights. I think the air-con is fucking busted. Anyway, you never notice because I'm always up earlier than you."

It's true. Eddie is always out running or taking care of errands by the time Richie eventually emerges from bed, making use of the cooler mornings before the day starts cracking the sidewalks.

"You drool, by the way. And you talk even more shit in your sleep. Trashmouth by day, Trashmouth by night."

"Only because I'm dreaming about you, Spaghetti Head."

"Fuck off," Eddie retorts, coming to stand at the edge of the bed. He fiddles with the waistband of his shorts, crossing and uncrossing his arms. "It's — I'm still not — I want to be okay with it. I do. It's embarrassing," he finishes, muttering, his eyes downcast.

"What's embarrassing? Having a dick? You know I have one too, right?"

"No, I assumed it fell off around the sixth time you caught an STD, actually," Eddie says tartly, but his gaze is hovering around Richie's crotch. Richie lets his thighs fall open a little wider, relishing the way he can still see Eddie's face flush in the velvety shadows.

Eddie does climb back into his side of the bed, after turning the light off. The darkness envelops them again like a shield, tucked away safe from the outside, where the sun is waiting just a few hours away to shine a big fucking Eye of Sauron spotlight on their insecurities.

Eddie speaks, haltingly. "It's embarrassing 'cause — if you see it, it's because we're gonna be. Y'know."

"Fucking?" Richie supplies, his heart picking up in little tentative skips.

"Yeah," Eddie says, his breath fluttering out. Richie feels the bed dip as he shuffles closer, radiating heat like a furnace. He keeps his hands to himself, and listens. "Fucking. Like, for real. It makes it real, and I'll have to — to accept what you do to me. How you make me feel. It's stupid."

Affection blooms through Richie's chest so violently it feels like his diaphragm is going to explode. Before Derry, before remembering his friends and being honest with himself, he had forgotten he was even capable of loving someone like this, like he loved the Losers, and Eddie most of all. Wanting to make someone feel wanted, and safe.

It figures that Eddie would be the one to bring it out in him. Twenty-seven years, and he still wants to be the only thing Eddie sees.

"Eds, Jesus, you think I don't feel the exact same fuckin' thing? We're in this together, man. Losers stick together, and we're the biggest losers there are. Look, I told you before, I don't *care* if we never get there, that's not what matters. We'll just be two crusty old bachelors dry-humping until our hips break, and I'll die a happy man." He reaches into the dark to poke at Eddie's stomach. "Now, it's hot as Satan's asshole in here, so take your budgie-smugglers off and go to sleep before you get a gross rash."

Eddie snickers into the dark cocoon of silence that follows, and then his hand is curling into Richie's sweaty tangles to drag him forward into a sweet kiss. Richie pulls his glasses off awkwardly without letting Eddie go further than a hair's breadth away, setting them blindly back on the side table. His hand curves over the bony rise of Eddie's hip, stroking his thumb in the groove there, Eddie shivering against him with his mouth soft, and open.

They settle back into sleepy contentment, but not before Eddie gently grabs his wrist, and presses Richie's hand between his legs.

“That’s for you,” he mumbles. Richie’s sure his brain is going to pour out of his nose, hot and liquified. The soft bulge of him under the fabric has his palm on fire. “That’s yours.”

And then he rolls over, twisting around to tug his shorts back off and drop them over the side to the floor. Richie falls asleep with his hand tingling, and his head spinning in long, volcanic loops.

He slips out of bed early the next morning to make an attempt at omelets. If he stares at Eddie’s sleeping pout any longer he’ll end up kissing his forehead, or something else disgusting. He settles for kissing one tanned bicep.

Mornings are deceptive. The dawn-faded sapphire blue of the sky always promises a beautiful day, tricks Richie into complacency before the heat comes hammering down, the sun evaporating up the city’s stink until the horizon is gray with pollution. But he’s up before Eddie, so the sunlight is falling in shafts through dancing motes of dust, over the eggs and parsley, as Richie bops around the kitchen. Singing his head off along to crunching guitars. Happiness filling his stomach like a helium balloon, lifting him off the ground.

It’s probably too early for the kind of music he likes, and it’s probably too loud, which is why he doesn’t notice Eddie until he sees him standing like a bleary-eyed ghost in the doorway, dressed in nothing but a pair of Richie’s boxers.

“Jesus *shit*, man,” he sputters, moving to hastily turn the volume down. “You scared the crap outta me.”

“Sorry,” Eddie says, not sounding sorry at all. He scratches his stomach, and Richie is momentarily distracted by the pillow creases on his face, and the way the movement jiggles Eddie under Richie’s shorts, the slight morning swell of his dick unmistakable now that he knows what it *looks like*. “Your music scared the crap outta me.”

Richie cringes, tearing his eyes away to look down at the frothy bowl



of eggs. “Oh, right. Sorry, I—”

“Don’t be sorry, I like it. I needed to wake up anyway. It’s like a bunch of howler monkeys with ADHD, it’s perfect for you,” Eddie yawns, coming to stand at his shoulder.

His hands wriggle under the back of Richie’s shirt, holding onto the extra little curve of fat around his hips. Then he’s wrapping himself all around Richie’s middle like a scruffy-jawed koala, swaying sleepily. Richie’s heart beats for him like it has a mind of its own, straining all his blood and nerve endings towards Eddie’s touch, where his fingers drift through the hair on Richie’s stomach.

“Are you making breakfast?” Eddie asks. His voice rumbles vibrations into Richie’s back, the way the earth tremors every week out here. It’s equally nerve-racking, and he shivers, closing his eyes to keep still. To keep Eddie there. In the event of an earthquake, find the most stable part of the house. He wants to be that, for Eddie.

There was a guy Richie hooked up with for a few weeks under the radar, who always laughed at the music Richie played. Or the movies he wanted to watch, or the way he likes to sing every part of a song, even the instruments. It was teasing laughter at first, but then it just got meaner, and meaner, as the guy came to realize Richie’s strangeness wasn’t just an act he puts on for gigs. That his Voices come right out from somewhere deep in his head that he can’t control, even as he can see he’s annoying people. And annoying people only makes him more nervous, makes him do more Voices, because then maybe people will be mad at them instead of at Richie himself.

Eddie’s poking interestedly at the shiny red skin of the bell peppers, peering over his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Richie sighs. Eddie’s hand is still sleep-cozy, when Richie threads their fingers together. He’s suddenly sad he missed the sight of him waking up. “Yeah. It was supposed to be a surprise. Omelets are pretty much all I can make, but I make ‘em awesome. I missed my calling as a YouTube chef. *RichEats Tozier*. I only wear an apron and I just make the one same dish, every video.”

"You make a pretty good mess," Eddie says, kissing the bump of his spine through the soft cotton of his shirt. He moves away to slump down at the breakfast bar.

The eggs are a little runny, because that's how Richie likes them. He watches Eddie demolish his plateful, taking quick bites between yammering on about a stupid billboard he saw on the 405. His rumpled hair is lit up golden at the ends in the sun, like he's on fire, and Richie slides his bare feet under the table to trap Eddie's ankle between them.

"—and I thought, *that's creepy as shit*, y'know, that's a traffic hazard to have that thing lookin' at you while you're trying to drive, and — what are you doing?"

Richie squints at him, one eye closed, then the other. Then the first, again. Left, right, left, Eddie's bewildered expression shifting slightly each time. "I'm trying to figure out if you're hotter from one eye or the other. Stay still."

Eddie snorts into his orange juice, blushing like a grapefruit right up to the roots of his hair. Sour and sweet and pink. "Oh yeah? What's the conclusion, ya weirdo?"

"Hm. Maybe the left? This is hard, I gotta decide which one to get an eyepatch for. So you're hot twenty-four-sevs."

Eddie grins at him, and slowly closes one eye. He props his chin in his hand, and then they're just awkwardly winking at each other.

"Whaddaya think?"

"Not sure," Eddie says. He leans back in his chair, and Richie cracks up when he feels bare, sun-warmed toes run up the back of his leg. "You look pretty good outta both."

"Cheers to that."

Richie toasts him with mock sincerity, swigs down his juice, and pulls Eddie to his feet, sweeping him around the kitchen and hollering along to his awful, favorite music, until Eddie's choking on laughter and joining in.

## Notes for the Chapter:

the music richie is listening to is [this](#) because it's one of my absolute favourite albums and i think richie would like it too

[@skinks](#) on tumblr!! all i do is reblog reddie art and rant about wanting to fuck bill hader and james ransone!

## 5. Chapter 5

The heatwave spreads through the city like slow, inexorable magma, washing June into July in a haze of sun-spots. It isn't easy, sometimes. The heat and the way even their eyelids sweat makes them both irritable and snappish about stupid shit, like Richie not using enough sunblock at the beach. Or Eddie refusing to help walk Oliver the Dalmatian, because *it's too fucking hot, you go die of sunstroke if you want to, Richie.*

The searing white orb of the sun plants dreams of the Deadlights in Richie's head. Of Eddie cold and limp against him, with a black-blood rend in his chest.

But at the end of the day, Eddie still rubs aloe into Richie's peeling shoulders, his own pink nose wrinkling as he rants about skin cancer. And Richie still brings Eddie piña coladas on the terrace to keep him feisty and hydrated, and the sky is the same skin-melting blue of a fire's heart, and Eddie continues to sleep bare, in Richie's bed.

In their bed.

Eddie still wraps his arms around Richie's neck, strokes his back gently when Richie wakes up with wet cheeks, and the need to hiccup into Eddie's shoulder until the dreams fade.

"Zhese are my di-a-monds, comrade."

"You would not know a di-a-mond if I shoved vun up your asshole."

"Vell, vhy don't you come over here and try it, blyat—"

"Richie?"

His balls practically retract up into his body with how hard he jumps. He blinks some of the alcohol blur from his vision and quickly swipes a hand down his face, turning to see Eddie stepping out onto the shadowy patio with his eyebrows raised.

“I didn’t hear you get home.”

“And that’s why I keep telling you we need a better security system than your *intuition*.”

“It doesn’t count as breaking and entering if you have a key, Eds,” Richie points out.

It’s the Fourth of July, and Richie has been waiting it out, drunk and alone in the garden. Some of the SNL writers are in town, and had invited him out to a party, but Richie didn’t particularly feel like explaining to a bunch of straight people the reason why he was quite so motherfucking morose.

Eddie steps closer, loosening his boring tie and popping the top button of his shirt. He’s holding something behind his back, and Richie wobbles sideways on the deck chair, trying to get a look.

“Got you something.”

“Oh *sweet*.”

It’s a baseball cap, with the words I HATE NYC embroidered in big blue letters on the front. Richie jams it on his head immediately and grins up at Eddie, who finds his deep love for the west coast both inexplicable and hilarious.

“I’m ashamed to be seen with you.”

“Aw, Eddie Spaghetti. You know you’re still my Maine man.”

Eddie rolls his eyes, but his smile doesn’t reach them. “What were you doing?”

“Ah, y’know.” He waves a hand down the yard in the direction of the bird-feeder Eddie bought, where he had been making up Voices for the squirrels who like to come and fight over peanuts. “Amusing myself.”

“Funny, it didn’t look like jerking off to me.”

“I’m not gonna jerk off to squirrels, Eds, that’s disgusting. You’re

disgusting.”

“Yeah,” Eddie says quietly, after a pause. Staring down into the leafy silhouettes of the azaleas. “Yeah, I probably am.”

It’s almost into the dark part of dusk, in the way that it’s never truly dark in Los Angeles, especially not when the sky is periodically bursting into sweeps of color from all the fireworks. Richie looks at Eddie properly, and even in the low light from the house he can see the smudged circles under his eyes, and the lines around his mouth are deeper than usual. Slimy panic crawls up Richie’s throat like phlegm, and he fumbles for Eddie to stand closer, between his knees.

“Fuck, dude, are you okay? Did something happen?”

“Nah, just... long flight, y’know.”

Fucking New York lawyers, acting like it wouldn’t be perfectly valid for Eddie to conduct meetings about the divorce over Skype.

The night is sticky with the smell of barbecue and distant, partying laughter. Even though the sun has sunk down into the ocean, it’s still burping up bubbles of heat that hang around the city like Spanish moss. Eddie’s shirt is sticking to his stomach, damp under Richie’s palms like he’s been swimming, and Richie hates it. Hates seeing him buttoned up, tie like a noose, and sad.

Eddie’s hands are shaky when they come to rest on Richie’s shoulders. “They’re, uh. They’re throwing around the word *infidelity*.”

Richie can feel his eyebrow raising of its own volition, and he bites his lip to tamp down a smirk. Now’s not a great time for his many beers to make an appearance.

“But we... I mean, what is this, a Lifetime movie? We haven’t done anything.”

The look Eddie shoots him could wither an entire Redwood forest. “You sure about that, dingus?”

“Touché. But hey, hold the fucking phone, how the fuck would they know if you’d done anything?”

“Right?!” Eddie explodes. Richie curves into his touch like a cat, as Eddie slides his palms down his back. “Thank you. Every time I go back east I forget how much I hate wearing these fucking shirts, but at least they hide the way you maul my goddamn neck.”

A pleased, possessive flush slides its way up Richie’s face, and he pulls Eddie closer. He’s only making up for all the hickeys he didn’t get to leave on Eddie all these years, and it’s not like his own throat looks any better. It might be frustrating sometimes, but he can’t remember ever having this much fun just *kissing* someone on the reg. Marking each other up like a scoreboard, because everything inevitably turns into a competition with them.

He wishes Eddie was wearing his shorts like he usually is, so he could tuck his hands up under the hems. Warm their bodies skin to skin so they could melt together, permanently. Maybe he’s still a little drunk.

“But then, she — Myra, I guess she saw me checking my phone, and she saw my screensaver. I forgot about it.”

“It’s called a lockscreen, babe,” Richie murmurs, but his mind is spinning out like cotton candy. Eddie’s lockscreen. It’s a blurry selfie Eddie took the day Richie dragged him to Disneyland months ago, Eddie’s eye crinkling with mirth in a tiny corner, while the rest of the frame is taken up with Richie, disgruntled and soaked like a drowned rat from some water ride.

“Well, whatever, she saw it and she got mad. She got really mad, Rich.” Eddie’s speaking faster, his words jumbling together, and Richie looks up at him in alarm. The fireworks pop overhead, illuminating Eddie’s crumpling face in blues and whites and reds. He covers his eyes, his other hand clenching in Richie’s shirt until Richie feels the seams start to rip. “She got so mad and — and she’s right, because we *are* — I *am*—”

“Eddie — Eddie no, c’mon—”

The sound of the inhaler rattling sets Richie’s teeth on edge. *Fuck this*, he thinks, watching helplessly as Eddie sucks on the thing like he hasn’t needed to for *months*. Not even when he goes running, not even when it’s been so hot, and yet here he is leaning on Richie’s

shoulders like he'll collapse if he doesn't. His heart feels like it's breaking in half at the sight, the blood spilling out wells scalding up to his eyeballs, has him seeing red.

"That *bitch*," he spits, gripping Eddie's thighs so his own hands won't shake.

"*Richie*," Eddie snaps, sharp. "Don't fucking call her that, alright? She's just hurt. I hurt her." He rubs at his unshaven face, sniffing. "I never wanted to hurt anyone."

Music drifts up towards them from somewhere down in the valleys below, like smoke.

Richie sighs, and flips his new cap backwards so he can burrow his face into Eddie's stomach. "You were hurting yourself by staying, Eds. What about you?"

"I guess... my whole life, with my mom and everything, hurting was a way to stay safe, or something. If I felt like shit, or if I got sick, that justified why I let her walk all over me. 'Cause I deserved to be fixed. I dunno. That's what my therapist says."

Richie's gonna hit something. "That's so fucked up," he says, muffled by Eddie's body.

Eddie snorts, still sounding a little wheezy, but his hands are steadier when they fit gently into the hinge of Richie's jaw. "You wanna know the real fucked up part? I didn't care what she was saying until she started talking shit about you."

His belly is warm with sweat through the shirt, when Richie mouths a soft kiss there.

"I don't think she gets why I'm happy. Or even who I am, any more. She only knows you from TV, so it was all this shit about how you weren't worth all this trouble. How you could never — um. Feel. About me. But it was all bullshit. Gazebos."

Richie barks out a laugh, feeling a roaring bonfire spread inside him that has nothing to do with the beer, or the gunpowder burn of the night air.



“And so I got mad, too,” Eddie continues. “I haven’t been that pissed since I saw you in the Deadlights. I was checking my phone ‘cause I — I missed you. I was worried about you, but I thought, shit, he must be out at a party or something, he’s probably fine. So I didn’t — I didn’t wanna be *checking up* on you, like she was always doing. Then I come home to find you drunk and talking to squirrels, like a loony.”

*Dog days*, that’s what they call it. The very bowels of summer that make people go crazy. Richie feels like a dog, feels territorial and owned all at once, inhaling deep into Eddie’s stomach until the sour airplane smell rolls in a physical weight on his tongue.

*Check up on me*. He skims his hands up over Eddie’s ass to bunch fists in the back of his shirt, pulling it free. *Please keep wanting to check up on me, forever*.

But that’s selfish. He *can’t* be something that only adds to Eddie’s anxiety.

Richie is selfish. He’s also drunk.

“I wasn’t talking *to* the squirrels, Eds, they’re talking *through* me.”

“Right. I knew there *musta* been a difference.”

He lets Richie pull his tie through the collar, lets him fumble open the tiny buttons of his shirt, pull down his scratchy suit pants ‘til he’s just in his briefs. Then they’re squashed together in the deck chair, and Richie’s arms are so full as they watch the sky mosaic with bursts of light.

“Tell me what they’re saying, then,” Eddie murmurs, kissing Richie’s temple, and straightening his hat for him.

So Richie does, happily.

“D’you think we could go see the Sierras some time?” Eddie asks, a little later, when the fireworks are petering out.

Richie squints down at him, knocked off-kilter from where they’d

been discussing the superior Batman. “Since when do you like hiking?”

“I don’t know if I like hiking, I’ve never been to the mountains!” Eddie huffs, winding his hand in Richie’s collar to shake him gently. “We don’t have to *hike*, dipshit, it’d just be cool to go. Air’s cleaner, and the altitude would get us away from the heat. I saw them outta the window when I was flying back tonight, and I thought... it’d be nice. And you fuckin’ love westerns.”

“I *do* love westerns,” Richie muses. “I’d have made a great cowboy, if I knew how to ride a horse.”

“Well, do you wanna go or not?”

The moon is a fat silver dollar up above them, but it can’t compete with the Fourth of July, with the bright lights of Hollywood, and especially not with Eddie Kasprak’s impatient, freckled face.

*I’d go anywhere*, Richie thinks.

He says, “Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker,” and kisses Eddie deep, for the rest of the night.

They go to the mountains above San Bernardino for a weekend. Eddie is back to wearing tank tops again, and decides he likes hiking, even if he freaks out about every stick he thinks is a rattlesnake. Richie eats too much cornbread, takes too many candids of Eddie dwarfed by Joshua trees, and makes out with Eddie on the ugly hotel bedspread until they’re both tenting the front of their shorts when the cleaning service comes in.

And they come home, baking down the interstate while Richie yodels along to country music, wearing the Stetson Eddie got him for his birthday. They bicker about milk in the dairy aisle and summer sloughs onward, ten months since Richie made a choice.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

THE BAREST WHISPER OF ANGST? IN MY

DOMESTIC AU??? it's more likely than you think. shhh pls don't tell anyone I have no idea how divorces work. Myra is a tricky subject to write about, it's hard to walk the line between acknowledging she's a carbon-copy of Eddie's abusive mother while also not making her some cartoonish harpy. It's just that this fic is entirely from Richie's POV and he's obviously biased when it comes to the situation.

i've been really overwhelmed by the response to this fic so far like holy shit??? thanks lads. i'm just glad everyone seems to be enjoying it so far! love all these wild anon asks i'm getting lmfao. @skinks you know the deal

## 6. Chapter 6

### Notes for the Chapter:

i was reading an interview with spike lee the other day, about his film Do the Right Thing, which also takes place in a heatwave, and the first thing he said was this: "After 95 degrees, motherfuckers lose their mind." i just thought that was a very apt summary of this fic, and maybe this chapter specifically

by which i mean this fic finally earns its rating

If Richie thought he was obsessed with Eddie before seeing him naked, before everything else, it's nothing compared to now. His thoughts are a constant whirlpool, spiralling around Eddie's hip grooves, the dusting of dark hair on the inside of his thighs, the sweet hollow of his sacrum. The way he wants to fuck Eddie into the mattress every night, like he wants to breathe.

He knew he liked men, but this is out of control.

The heat makes him aware of his body like never before. Like the universe is melding with his own internal temperature and becoming one, like he could melt into Eddie's body if he just gets close enough, like ice-cream. He wants at Eddie constantly; they're circling each other like animals half the time.

The basketball hoop above his garage door becomes an outlet for excess frustration, until he catches Eddie staring at him from where he's arguing with the gardener (a *friendly disagreement*, Eddie calls it. He's become very protective over the rockery.) Richie fumbles the ball when he notices Eddie looking, and it's bouncing away from him, leaves him standing there empty-handed like a fool, staring back. Richie's pouring sweat in an old gray pair of shorts, wearing nothing else under a shirt flapping open, patterned with little cacti wearing sombreros.

And Eddie's biting his lip with this look in his eye, one Richie recognizes, 'cause it's the way he used to look at Eddie slurping down

popsicles in high school. Unaware of Richie across in a corner of their clubhouse, his tongue basically hanging out with his body burning up like rocket fuel.

To Richie's own credit, he waits until they're both back in the dim, static air of the kitchen to pin Eddie up against the table. To suck at his neck and make him whine with it. Eddie's fingers accidentally grazing the head of his cock where it's straining his seams, bucking him forward like being electrocuted, knocking over the salt-shaker. Hands slipping hot through the coconut musk of sunblock, until Eddie's writhing away and complaining about Richie's sweat all over him, like they're not both sticky messes.

Richie screams silently into his hands for a few moments before heading for a shower, a *cold one*. They spend the evening eating delivered pizza, bodies sprouting damp and humid from the couch like mushrooms.

It's so hot that Eddie actually gives in to Richie's superhuman powers of persuasion, and starts ditching work for a few days per week to come and take refuge somewhere the A/C doesn't suck huge balls.

It might actually be because he gets sick of Richie scratching pathetically at his locked office door like a neglected dog, but who can tell. Not Richie, certainly, the inner workings of Eddie's mousetrap mind are still shrouded in dry ice like a campy VHS cemetery, and no amount of heat-maddened, off-key singing on Richie's part will ever reveal its secrets.

It does, however, get him Eddie flinging the door open with a harried, "Fine! Let's go!"

He's wild around the eyes, already stamping his feet into a pair of sneakers without even loosening the laces. Richie pumps his fist and follows him to the garage.

"Jeeze, you must really be losing it in there. All risk and no air makes Eddie a cranky boy."

“Don’t even fuckin’ say the word *risk* to me right now.”

“You need a new job, man. There’s a vein in your forehead that I’m pretty sure can vote.”

Eddie practically snarls, stabbing his seatbelt closed like he’s trying to kill the car. “I’m not *good* at anything else! I’m — I’m sick of being a killjoy for a living just so those greedy fucks can fleece people out of insurance money. It’s like — it’s like the complete opposite of what you do.”

Richie frowns, stuck on the first part. Eddie cares so much about so many things, Richie figures it’s the reason he’s so angry as often as he is.

“You’re good at tons of shit.”

“Just drive, alright?” Eddie grabs him around the wrist before Richie can poke the vein back into submission.

“Yessir. Let’s blow this dump.”

“The house isn’t a dump, Richie,” Eddie grumbles. “But yeah, let’s go. I don’t even care where.”

He takes a long gulp from a water bottle, and Richie misses the ignition with the key a few times because of the sleek configuration of his swallowing throat, the lines of his tendons sweeping into the loose collar of his tank.

If Eddie needs to relax, they *could* just turn on the car’s A/C and recline the seats...

“Richie?”

How quickly does carbon monoxide poisoning take to set in? He shakes his head free of all the little cartoon hearts swirling around it.

“Oh, yeah. You ever listened properly to the words in *A Whole New World*, babe? That shit is beautiful.”

And that's how they end up whiling away an afternoon in the blessed shade of the aquarium at Long Beach.

It's a goddamn paradise compared to the sulfuric, Martian-surface gray and orange of L.A. mid-July. Richie heaves a happy sigh, resting strategically beneath an air vent and waiting for Eddie to catch up. He likes to read all of the little information signs, bless his dorky heart.

Richie's here to see cool fish, and maybe to buy some sort of cool fish hat. The gift shop looked promising on their way inside.

The room is dark, awash with deep blue light and lilting panpipe music. Richie starts to feel like a frond of kelp himself, swaying loosely in some kind of Atlantean trance. Atlantrance?

"Atlantrance," he mutters to himself. "Good band name. Hey Eds, wanna start a band? You on triangle, me on everything else."

He snickers, and covers it by examining a placard when a kid nearby gives him a weird look.

There are only so many times he can read the same paragraph about mollusc behavior, so he backtracks to see if Eddie needs to be scooped out from the shark tank, or something. Richie would do it too, it'd be real heroic. Eddie might even kiss him in thanks while people clap.

Christ.

Why do they hand out those little paper maps if not for Richie to fan the horny flush away from his face? The heat and the sexual frustration are really getting to him, focusing between his legs, like a Bond villain laser trying to split him in half every time he so much as thinks about Eddie.

Speaking of which, he finds Eddie himself in the midst of a Mexican standoff through thick glass with a seal. Shimmering, aquatic light deepens the furrow between his eyebrows, throws him into relief like a mural on the underwater wall of a sunken Greek temple. Santorini blue, and scowling with Poseidon's wrath.

The viewing area is mostly empty. Eddie's resting bitch-face probably scared everyone away, like a pint-sized shark in chino shorts gliding through a coral reef.

Maybe he's just pissed to have found someone with even bigger, mournful brown eyes than him.

"Relative of yours, Eds?"

"Shit," Eddie says, jumping a little, his brow smoothing out immediately. "Oh, hi. Where were you? Look at this guy, it's so cute."

"Course he's cute, he looks like you."

Eddie elbows him hard, and Richie can see his half-moon grin reflected in the depths of the huge tank. It's always fun, trying to figure out just how Eddie manages to frown and smile all at once, like his face is in constant battle with what his brain is telling him he should be doing.

The pudgy seal rolls over, waving its wide, moon-rock flippers.

"Aw."

"See? It says this one had to be rescued after its, uh, fin broke. It got caught in some fucking trash."

Richie looks over at where Eddie's resting his hand on the glass. His right one, his right arm, the one with the old break Eddie still rubs with a slammed-door expression whenever he stays in the pool too long.

He clears his throat. They're supposed to be having *fun*. The seal sure looks healed up and happy enough, tumbling over like a fat little torpedo.

"I helped at a beach clean-up once, y'know," he says, puffing himself up to stand straighter.

One of Eddie's eyebrows makes an escape attempt. "Really?"

"Yep."



“Was there an open bar?”

“Hey!” Richie shoves him off balance, catching him again before he topples into a display of fake rock pools. Eddie flicks him hard in the ear, looking feisty. “Alright, I deejayed for a bunch of other people who were doing it.”

“Oh, big fuckin’ hero.”

“I was like, twenty! I needed a gig! Are you still impressed? Eddie?”

“Did you make any money?”

Richie clutches the map until it crumples. “No? It was for charity.”

“Then yes, I’m impressed,” Eddie says, turning to lean back against the glass and peer up into Richie’s face.

“Oh.”

It’s weird. The heavy crush of the summer heat speeds Richie’s heart up even when he’s doing diddly fucking squat, all his veins and valves opened wide like flowers in the sun, to frantically push his blood anywhere it might cool down. It might explain how crazy he feels half the time, though the other half is totally Eddie’s fault. His pulse had calmed though, in the cavernous darkness of the aquarium, ‘til he felt a spiritual connection with the peaceful little newt things chilling out on their patch of springy moss.

All his cool flies out the goddamn window as Eddie hooks a lazy grin at him, his hands stuffed into his pockets. A lean silhouette against watery indigo light, and it’s almost surreal. He’s like a black hole stark against a nebula of starry bubbles, and Richie can’t help but get sucked in.

Is it worth it, to find out what the penalties might be for making out against the seal exhibit? He can almost hear his heart sighing, *not this shit again*, as he watches Eddie push sweaty strands of hair back from his forehead.

“You want a picture with your pal, Eds?”

“Yeah, okay,” Eddie says quickly, his face brightening.

The seal swims over like a born performer, ready for its curtain call. Seriously, Richie has worked with less professional human beings.

“Alrighty then, say spaghetti.”

It’s adorable, of course. Eddie blazes with the same pleased smile he gets whenever Oliver the Dalmatian listens to him, draped in an ugly Ron Jon’s tank that can only be one of Richie’s.

The seal is cute, too.

“Okay, say *jiminy cricket, ah cawt me a big ole water varmint, hoo sheeit.*”

Eddie must be feeling very indulgent today, because he rolls his eyes and parrots him quietly, in a far better Forty-Niner Voice than Richie’s ever managed. Maybe the sun’s got him feeling loopy too, broiling his brain in his skull ‘til it spills out like a pie left too long in the oven. Or it could be that he’s just as relieved to be somewhere fresh and dark, reflected iridescence lulling them cool, cradled in this indoor ocean.

Eddie does hate the heat, he said so back in Derry. A nugget of kidney-stone guilt grows in Richie’s gut.

He swallows. “Now say, *beep beep* Richie.”

The seal twirls in a flume of silvery bubbles. Eddie shakes his head with a grin. “No, never. I don’t wanna say that.”

Well — huh. Alright. “Say, Richie’s the best.”

“*Definitely* not gonna say that.”

Richie snorts and it sets Eddie off too, as he raises the rare double finger at Richie’s phone camera, both hands, sticking his tongue out.

A little girl tuts nearby, waiting for her turn with the seal. Eddie says a hasty goodbye to his blubbery friend and hustles Richie away as he fiddles with his phone. The last picture makes for a good lockscreen,

replacing the previous masterpiece that was Eddie floating around in an inflatable chair in the pool.

“C’mon Eds, they have crocodiles this way.”

“Oh, cool!”

Richie stands as close behind Eddie as he dares, both of them drooping on the conveyor walkway as the tank tunnels arc overhead.

Rainbows of bioluminescence paint their way down Eddie’s face. The tickets weren’t expensive, but Richie’s distantly aware that he should really be getting his money’s worth by actually looking at the *fish* at some point.

“Gimme the map,” Eddie says, suddenly. His eyelashes flutter in the puffs of air as Richie just starts fanning him with it instead. “Oh. Thanks.”

“Your wish is my command, O Sultan Eds.”

“I *knew* you were watching Aladdin last night.”

“I can sing the song again if you like—”

“No, that’s,” Eddie’s twitching mouth looks like it’s struggling against the tide of his laughter. “That’s fine. You’ll scare the fish, just keep fanning.”

It’s a testament to how empty the tunnels are that he even lets Richie do that much. A young couple far ahead of them gazes up at the wafting flight of a stingray, the girl wrapped in the guy’s arms.

Would it be so terrible?

Richie looks down at his own hands, all pale and spiked through with protruding bones like a lionfish.

Would the tank crack? Would the world come crashing down in a flood of glass and water? Would the sharks’ jaws distend open into

four alien segments bristling with teeth, Deadlights spinning inside, and punish Richie for wanting to hold Eddie's hand, here, where people might possibly see?

"You don't have to impress me."

Richie blinks. He didn't realize he'd been slacking on fan duties, and Eddie takes hold of his wrist to make him start again, his grip like a hot fucking poker against Richie's air-conditioned skin.

A warm shiver races through him. Eddie's looking at an electric blue fish, still holding his wrist. Thousands of pounds of water hung above their heads, and Eddie's down here with him, risking the flood.

"What?" Richie asks.

"The beach clean-up thing. You don't have to impress me. I like it here," he adds, nonsensically.

"Where, the aquarium?"

"No," Eddie says, glancing up to meet his eyes. Richie's doing the best job he can with the map, but Eddie's face still looks pink. "California."

Richie's too muddled up with first the sun and then the water, too muddled into a murky swamp of strange thoughts to parse whatever the fuck *that* means. But he keeps fanning, and Eddie tells him which cool fish hat looks worse, and that's the one Richie buys.

They emerge, spat back into the sunlight like driftwood thrown onto a beach, and they do wind up reclining the car seats to make out until Richie's desperately hard, tasting the Pacific salt of Eddie's mouth.

The weeks wear on in a charred and stitched-together tapestry of zoo visits, museum visits, endless cinema screenings. Of dry-humping against the ping-pong table like uncontrollable teenagers, though it becomes more like damp-humping through the drag of sweat, and the way Richie has to stumble to the bathroom after Eddie pulls away, to

jack off with his teeth making dents in his arm.

Half the movies they see are utter dogshit, but it's worth it for the cool air twining around their legs, and Eddie's fingers twining into Richie's in the dark.

And then, all at once, there comes a night in late July when Richie's tossing in and out of sweltering consciousness, and comes awake to soft, choked noises right beside him.

He grunts, fighting the dark to sit up. "What...?"

The noises slice silent.

He can make out the barest shape of Eddie, lit by L.A.'s orange glow through the shutter blinds. Apparently frozen stiff, but Richie can still hear the telltale rush of someone panting, and trying to hide it. He fumbles around in the dark for the bedside lamp switch, eventually finding it, a little concerned that his nightmares might be catching.

"What are you—"

Eddie stares at him across the pillow like a rabbit about to get mown down, headlights reflecting nothing but panic. Mouth slack, and pink like he's been biting it. Richie can see his tongue pushing into the side of his cheek, and one of his hands is cupped tight around his erect cock.

"Holy *shit*," Richie croaks.

Lust rockets through him in a Lichtenberg scar, spreading into every cell and empty space between them, shocking him fully awake. Eddie pants out a breath like he can't hold it in, his arm flexing.

"I — I was..."

Richie swallows, trying to flood his parched mouth. His ears are burning right off his head. Eddie's balls twitch, and his cock is *wet* in his grip, like he's been at this for a while.

This is really fucking happening. “Were you jerking off... to me? Asleep?”

“No, to your mom,” Eddie says thickly, his voice cracking and his eyes roaming hungry over Richie’s face, coal-dark. Flushed all over his whole body, once sleek, now a little rangier with the years. Just like Richie. Curled protectively around where he’s most tender, and needy.

He’s so fucking beautiful.

Richie snorts, turning over on his side so they’re face to face. Even the sheets are hot, clenched in his unsteady fist. “Why didn’t you go in the bathroom like a decent person? Like I do?” Eddie makes a small, hurt noise at that, his eyes widening. Richie’s throat is like sandpaper. He needs water. He needs to see Eddie come, more. “No biggie, Eds. You’re cute.”

“Shut up, don’t call me that. M’not a fucking kid.”

“No siree. Y’know, whenever I say *cute*, I mean you’re sexy as hell.”

“Shut the fuck *up*.”

“I can’t. I can’t shut up. You should be grateful my nose isn’t bleeding, look at you.”

“Ugh,” Eddie groans, burying his pinched expression in the crook of his elbow. “Don’t look at me.” His hand starts moving again, curling frantic around the damp head of his cock.

“How the *fuck* am I supposed to not look at you?”

Nothing about Eddie’s many hang-ups or rage issues has ever screamed *big dick* to Richie, and he’s a perfect, regular size when he’s soft, but fuck, has he ever been more pleased to be proven wrong. All of his nighttime fantasies about getting his mouth full of that softness, keeping Eddie there ‘til he comes, they’ve been dashed. The guy’s a grower, that’s for sure. Eddie’s stern eyebrows furrow into something like agony, like he’s chasing something he’d die for, as Richie watches, avidly. Arousal pulses him to dizzying hardness in sympathy, fixated on Eddie’s slim fingers spreading out in a blur

around the way his cock swells thick up the shaft, snug in its velvety-looking foreskin.

“You been doing this most nights too, babe?” he whispers, nuzzling in at Eddie’s crimson face, nudging their sweating foreheads together.

“No — yeah — fuck, you know how, *hahh*, hard it is not to? You’re so fucking—”

“Me?!” Richie laughs. He doesn’t know if he’s allowed to touch, so he’s relieving the ache in his body by mouthing wet kisses against Eddie’s jaw, his chin.

Slowly, so slowly, Eddie turns his face and starts kissing him back. Starts lapping in close, starts biting gently at Richie’s lower lip, how he *knows* Richie likes it.

He keeps halting the desperate pace of his hand to shake it out, like he’s cramping, and Richie feels about two seconds from shooting off himself. Never in his wildest dreams did he think he’d have Eddie Kaspbrak in his bed one day, wringing his cock with his leg hooked around Richie’s knee. He slides his hand under Eddie’s thigh to pull him closer, and Eddie’s *whimpering* into their endless, messy kiss.

Slick skin noises between them, Richie’s knuckles slinking down the shadowed valley of Eddie’s ribcage, the dark line of hair. He wants to touch so fucking badly his teeth hurt. *Please, please let me. I’ve wanted this literally longer than I can remember.*

“What *about* me, Eds? I’m so fucking what?” Richie presses, hoarse. “You think about me when you do this? ‘Cause I think about you, holy shit. I’m a five-times-a-day guy now. I’m gonna need a wrist brace, you turn me on so hard.”

Eddie half-pants, half-laughs into the burning few inches between them, and then he’s — he opens his eyes, staring at Richie so intense he feels like he’s swallowed his tongue.

“You — I want — fuck—”

Richie can’t *breathe*. “Any — anything, man, I’ll fuckin’ do it.”

Eddie moans, the sound loud and incredulous. His hand speeds up, and he's lurching forward to kiss Richie again, like he's never been kissed before, like Eddie wants to devour him whole.

"Want you, want — *you*—"

Richie grins hard against his tipped-open mouth. He can feel Eddie's pulse flying in his throat when he gentles his hand there. "Yeah?"

"Oh fuck, yeah dumbass, *you* — my therapist says I gotta understand there's, there's nothing w-wrong with me for — wanting — *shit*, Richie, *Richie*," Eddie hisses through clenched teeth. He grabs blindly at Richie's other hand where it's inching down to his own erection, and makes him hold on to Eddie's forearm where it's tensing with effort.

"*Richie — fuck—*"

"Yeah," Richie breathes, "yeah, c'mon Eds, that's — that's it. Doin' so fuckin' good."

Something about that does it. He feels the moment Eddie lets go with a loud, ragged whine, blood pounding hot in Richie's face like his brain is trying to break through his skull. He swallows down the noise from Eddie's mouth and hastily moves to catch most of the come before it can dribble onto the bed, because something tells him Eddie will probably freak out, and insist on changing the sheets in the middle of the night if there's a wet spot.

Eddie lies there with his eyes closed, panting against Richie's collarbone like he's run a sprint. Richie can't help kissing his burning cheeks and carding his clean fingers through his hair, until Eddie groans, stuffing his face between the pillows.

It takes all of twenty seconds for Richie to get off harder than he ever has, teeth set in Eddie's shoulder and his hand already slick with Eddie's come. He lies splayed out in a blown-apart constellation of himself, and watches Eddie watch him with one eye cracked open.

"Fuck," Eddie says, eventually.

He looks sort of dismayed, but also sort of pleased with himself. Like



when he used to bully his way into the hammock, before realizing what he'd actually done. Rewarded with Richie's dirty socks in his face.

"I can't feel my legs," Richie replies.

"Well, I'm not carrying you to the bathroom."

"It's fine, I'll just die here anyway. That was the hottest thing that's ever happened to me." His belly is splattered with his own release, and he contemplates the glistening mess of his hand. Then waves it in Eddie's face, who scowls and bats it away.

"That's fucking *gross*, are you kidding me? What are we, twelve?"

"I hope not. No twelve year old has a dick like *that*." He looks pointedly at Eddie's softening length where it's still gently twitching against his thigh. "Where did that come from?"

"Jesus Christ," Eddie mutters, his hesitant grin a crooked white slash in the low warmth of the lamplight.

"It's gorgeous. Seriously, you should be, like, a boner model or something."

"Okay, okay, I get it. This is all funny to you." Eddie sits up against the headboard, hugging his knees to his chest.

"I'm just teasing, babe." Richie pushes slowly up with his clean hand, to sit beside him. "Your therapist is right, y'know."

"Hm?"

"There's nothing wrong with you. Not about this, and believe me, it took me a long-ass time to get that part."

Richie feels severely unqualified to be giving this type of reassurance, considering his sexuality still makes him feel like three different kinds of fraud. He squashes it down, because he can't stand the strained look on Eddie's face. It makes him wanna punch every single thing that ever planted the idea in Eddie's head that he's inherently sick.

“But there’s nothing wrong with you. I mean, I hate that you never believe me when I say I’m fine, and your road-rage scares the shit out of me, but—”

He tips his forehead against Eddie’s temple, his damp hair. Eddie turns until their noses brush, his mouth pressed in a line and his eyes a little too shiny.

“But you wouldn’t be *my* Eds, otherwise,” Richie whispers. “And then there really would be something wrong. Big trouble. I’d have to kick your ass.”

Eddie closes his eyes, breathes out slowly through his nose. Richie feels like he’s going cross eyed, trying to take him all in. “My therapist said you’d probably say something like that.”

Sure, his *therapist*. Funny how a lot of the shit Eddie’s therapist says sounds just like him.

“Yeah? You talk to her about me a lot?”

“Sometimes,” Eddie says, failing to keep the smile out of his voice. “I blame everything on you, actually.”

“Hey! I’m nothing but a good influence.” He peers down into the shadows between Eddie’s legs, where his cock is lying sated and sticky. “Was this her idea too? Maybe I oughta write her a check.”

Eddie rolls his eyes. “No, fucker, this one was all me.” He cups Richie’s face and lays a quick kiss to the corner of his mouth, before rolling out of bed, towards the bathroom. Richie hears him muttering, “No way you could kick my ass,” as he goes.

Richie listens to the shower turn on, and thinks about blame.

Maybe it is his fault. Maybe Eddie wouldn’t be like this if Richie had never loved him. Belief has a way of manifesting things into reality, they learned that much down in the sewers. Fence-posts kill monsters, if you believe they do, and maybe Eddie is only here in his bed, in the cauldron of California with him because Richie had wanted it so fucking bad.

But then he remembers the awestruck look on Eddie's face back in September, dappled in the fading green light of a country road in Maine. Richie would have felt like a duplicitous scumbag if he invited Eddie to stay with him without making sure they were at least reading from the same book, even if Eddie wasn't exactly on the same pitiful, torch-carrying page as Richie.

He remembers Eddie looking back and forth between Richie's hunched, terrified shoulders, and the initials carved into the Kissing Bridge, like his world was shifting into place. His small cough, and his tucked-in turtle nod, and the fact that he came to L.A. anyway.

And Richie thinks, *nah, this is real.*

He wipes himself down with a tissue and waits for Eddie to come back to bed, so they can fall asleep together.

### Notes for the Chapter:

[pulls collar] it only gets hornier from here lads

there ARE seals and a walk-through tank at the Aquarium of the Pacific at long beach but that's the extent of my research. but let's be honest, is an aquarium even valid if it doesn't have panpipe music and fake rock pools? nope

Richie's cacti/sombrero shirt is a real shirt in a shop in my town i've considered buying for the past month, just to be richiecore. ask questions or bear witness to my descent into horny madness at [@skinks](#)

EDIT: this chapter now has [absolutely gorgeous fanart!!!](#) i'm not worthy! go give the artist some love

## 7. Chapter 7

August comes crashing down on them in a supernova, red and unbearable to look at, like closing eyelids against the sun and having it burn through the filigree blood vessels anyway. Los Angeles fries, and Richie can't think about anything other than Eddie and sex.

It's like discovering what his dick is for all over again, almost thirty years later. The same all-consuming pulsing in his blood, the inability to concentrate in meetings with journalists, or the people from Netflix who are supposed to be filming his comeback special. Except, it's worse than being twelve with a furtive magazine clutched under the bedcovers, because instead of a Playboy it's the love of his life. Brave, twitchy Eddie, with a filthy mouth and the most beautiful cock Richie's ever been allowed to touch. Not that he's touched that many in the first place, but it's the thought that counts. And Richie has thoughts coming out of his ass.

He thinks about it when he wakes up, finding his hand has splayed against the soft skin of Eddie's waist in the night. And Eddie is awake, still in bed and breathing fast, faster when Richie's hand finds his morning wood, like he's been *waiting*.

He thinks about it in the shower, when the cool water should be a relief, but all it does is remind him of the droplets trickling through the sparse hair on Eddie's stomach that morning, when he burst through the bathroom door to bitch Richie out about toothpaste he'd left on the sink. He'd only been getting started when his reprimanding crashed and burned like a plane shot out of the sky, staring at Richie pulling his clothes on, and then they were shoving each other back into bed.

Hence, why Richie has to keep taking so many showers. There's nothing worse than dried spunk catching on the fly of his boxers and pulling his pubes out.

He thinks about it when he eats breakfast, staring vacantly at the countertop he had backed Eddie into one evening, shorts pooled

around his ankles and coming before his briefs were even off. His hand curved like a gauntlet around the back of Richie's head, Richie gripping clouds of bruises into his hips and sucking at the ripe-tasting wet spot.

He thinks about after, when Eddie's knees buckled down to sun-heated kitchen floor, when he'd anxiously insisted on getting Richie off with the heel of his hand, the other clenched tight in the hair at Richie's nape as they bit each other's mouths raw.

He's thinking about it as they lie scorching on Venice Beach, the Pacific sparkling before them like gemstones sewn into a vast blue swathe of silk.

Eddie is somehow managing to glare daggers through his shades at the teenagers kicking a beach ball around nearby, and Richie isn't even pretending to look anywhere other than at him. His boring blue trunks, kept determinedly away from the sand he's convinced is full of dog shit particles. Maybe Richie needs to take up some new hobbies, get his drum set out of storage, because he's sure he can make out every curve of Eddie's junk underneath.

The unrelenting sunshine has sprayed freckles all across Eddie's shoulders and the straight, handsome bridge of his nose. *Sun kisses*, Richie's mom used to call them. She and his father are long gone, though, so he'll have to take up the mantle. He remembers Mrs Kaspbrak trying to scrub Eddie's cheeks clean on more than one occasion, thinking he was just dirty. He remembers wishing he were the sun, just so he could kiss his own marks into Eddie's scrunched up little face.

He rolls onto his stomach, digging his feet into the burning sand where their umbrella doesn't cover. The white streak of scar tissue is the only part of Eddie's face not golden when he turns the full force of his severe eyebrows onto Richie.

"Stop looking at my dick."

Richie bursts out laughing. "I wasn't! I was looking at your... shorts."

“Uh huh.” Eddie smirks at him. There’s a bite mark, a petal of burst capillaries low on his stomach where his drawstring cinches. Richie’s toes curl in the sand.

“They’re great. Where did you find them, the old man store?”

“If that’s what you call the back of your closet, then yeah.”

“*Ouch*, point to Spagheds. It’s not my fault you screwed up my system.” Richie can feel his stupid smile oozing into a sleazy coil, and he drops his voice low. “It’s really hot when you wear my clothes, though.”

Eddie coughs, turns his head away, like suddenly the beach ball game is the most fascinating thing in the world. He ain’t as slick as he thinks. Like this, it’s clearer than ever he’s still eyeing Richie up from behind his mirrored, aviator shield.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Richie says. He arches his spine to lean up on his elbows, and watches Eddie’s jaw muscle flex. “I’d wear yours, babe, but I grew outta kids’ sizes a while ago.”

“Ah, fuck you,” Eddie scoffs. “You’d stretch ‘em all out with your giant head anyway.”

“Fuckin’ *zing!*” Richie brays. God, if there’s anything better than Eddie getting off good ones, Richie doesn’t wanna know about it. “He’s on fire, ladies and gents. Just for the record, I can look wherever the fuck I want, including at your dick. It’s a free country.” He headbutts Eddie gently in the ribs. “Plus, you said it was *mine*.”

He feels Eddie tense against him. Richie’s pretty sure no one’s able to hear them bickering over the surf and the teeming cries of the parrots that infest the pier, but still. Something unpleasant twinges in his chest as the teenagers cheer and hoot nearby, reminds him of jittery arcade daring, and the nauseating weight of people *seeing* him for what he is.

Then Eddie relaxes, visibly unclenching his jaw. He’s come a long way, really, since Derry last year. It’s not as if Richie is unaware of

Eddie's many and varied issues, completely the opposite. He's had a front row seat to the physical embodiment of hypochondria since they were both in grade school, minus the obvious gap in the middle. But it's this; the little things, like lying together on the same beach towel, Eddie trusting him to smooth sunscreen everywhere he can't reach, even though he knows exactly how bad Richie wants to touch him everywhere *else*. It means so much to Richie that it chokes him up, sometimes.

Eddie pushes Richie's head away, but his hand is gentle as it teases out the briny mess of his hair. "That was in *private*," he mutters. "Out here you're just a perv."

"That's a beautiful sentiment. Thanks, man."

"Keep it for free, dickwad. I can't have a perv for a boyfriend."

The waves sing. Richie blinks.

Sits up on his knees.

"You, uh."

Gulls screech overhead, like a record player scratching to a halt.

"I — shit, are you okay?" Eddie's taken the sunglasses off to peer nervously at Richie, fiddling with the legs. Maybe it's sunstroke that's got Richie feeling so faint.

"Yeah — fuck, I dunno why I'm — wait, hold on, wait," Richie says, and it's all garbled, because he can't think straight. His chest is expanding with light and air, a fucking Hindenburg disaster, and he's mortified to feel the hot sting of tears. "I've never had a boyfriend before."

"Me neither," Eddie murmurs. "Aw, Rich, don't cry."

"I'm not *crying*."

It's still roasting there in the shade of their umbrella, dark and secret like their bed at night. Eddie gently takes off Richie's glasses to clean them, lets him take a moment to wipe his eyes on his shirt.

"I guess... I mean, that's what we are, right? I thought you knew."

"I *did* know," Richie says, shakily. "It's just weird to hear it out loud. I was — when we were kids, I thought I'd ruin everything. Because of what I wanted. And now I've got it, and—"

He knuckles his eyes, hard. God, they're surrounded by people.

"You haven't ruined anything, Richie."

"I know! This is me being happy, I swear!" He gives Eddie a watery smile, and his arm breaks out in goosebumps despite the heat, when Eddie starts to rub small circles into it. "I just... always wanted it to be you. Of course I knew, I'm so dumb. Like, duh, you make me the best chowder I've ever had, and you're allergic to shellfish. You let me touch your dick."

Eddie stares at him, doe eyes dark and intent. He turns like a flash to peek outside their tiny nook of privacy, then he's back with his thumbs stroking the corners of Richie's eyes, cradling his face.

"Listen, alright? *No-one* gets to touch me like you do," Eddie whispers, fiercely. "It's my body and my fuckin' decision to give you — nobody gets to tell me I'm sick any more, 'cause — 'cause I'm not. We're not. You were the first person I believed when you told me I wasn't, because for all the weird shit you say, you *never* lie to me. And I love — I love that, and I'm so fuckin' happy you're my boyfriend."

Richie gapes at him. Eddie's gaze darts around his face like a pond skipper. "So please — please don't cry. I thought you were having a heart attack. I thought I was gonna have one."

Eddie's face is pink up to his hairline and the neon flare of his ears. It's him, so Richie *knows* it's not sunburn. The beach is blinding white and technicolor behind him, and Richie thinks, *I hope this is what I see when I'm sailin' down the Styx.*

Instead, he swallows back fresh tears, strokes the tender inside skin of Eddie's wrists and says, "I love you too, Eds."

Somehow Eddie blushes impossibly pinker, his hands falling loosely



to Richie's shoulders. "I know you do, ya big fucking sap."

"Hey, I'm not the one who just gave a big speech about how we're finally going steady at forty years old. *Boyfriends* makes us sound like we're still in tighty-whities though, maybe that's why it's weird."

"Well, what would you call us?"

"I dunno. Really close bros? Lovers?"

Eddie grimaces like someone took a turd in his drink. "I think *partners* is fine, you weirdo."

Richie beams at him. "Look at us, middle-aged, loser boyfriend partners having relationship talks on the beach."

"We wouldn't have had to, if you weren't so goddamn clueless. So embarrassing," Eddie says. He tucks some of Richie's hair back, stroking the shell of his ear with his thumb. "You've dated way more people than I have, how do you not know this shit?"

Richie might not ever stop smiling. He knows, now, that Eddie's marriage to Myra was really a necessary shield erected between Eddie and his own repression. A comfortable bunker he could hide in, maybe, but only one of them has had a long term relationship before, and it sure isn't Richie.

Richie's never had to think about this stuff, because he spent his entire adult life running from it. While he might have spent the early 2000s illicitly fooling around with other dudes, it's not like he was ever comfortable enough to lie close on a beach with them, or do their paperwork side by side at the dinner table. Eddie still seems to have this idea that he's some big bisexual Casanova, though.

"None of 'em were you, Eds."

"Alright, alright," Eddie grumbles. He slaps away Richie's questing hand, which had been sneaking down to the dark line of Eddie's waistband, but the corner of his mouth is curling up. "You need to cool off, we're still in public. You want some water?"

Richie keeps his hand possessively on Eddie's knee, can feel eyes on

his bobbing throat as he chugs the water Eddie produces from his fussy little cooler. It slips down his gullet, the chill of it burning his insides as Eddie's hot gaze ratchets the one-hundred-and-two afternoon up another fifty points of mercury.

"Here," Eddie says, raspy-voiced. He shuffles closer, and his eyes are like polished jet, hooded as he presses a slippery ice cube between Richie's lips.

The pads of his fingers are sea-salty at the tip of Richie's tongue. *This has to count as public indecency*, Richie thinks, heart hammering as he scrapes gently at the sandy grit of Eddie's nail beds with his teeth. The ice cube melts, slowly, and Eddie's hand is deliciously cold on Richie's sweating Adam's apple, as he swallows.

And this has been an unforeseen consequence to finally having regular sex with Eddie, though sometimes it feels like more of an unmitigated disaster than a perk. That is, discovering that Eddie's obsessive mania actually extends to the pursuit of both his own orgasms and Richie's. Turns out, Eddie's making up for time lost to a sexless marriage by being a horny little bastard.

*Go figure*, Richie thinks, nobly, watching Eddie stare at his mouth. *Guess I have to be the sensible one, for once.*

"C'mon, short-stack," he says, and then Eddie's kicking sand and cursing a filthy streak through his laughter, as Richie hauls him down to the crowded blue of the ocean, warm as bath-water.

Eddie's fingers are in his mouth again that night, scalding now without the ice.

"Jesus," he keeps saying, and his legs are shaking where Richie's holding them wide apart. "*Fuck*, Jesus Christ—"

Richie bites at the knuckles and pulls off with a loud *slurp*, tonguing the spaces between Eddie's fingers. "Just *Richie*, is fine."

"Asshole," Eddie laughs, breathless.

The stark tan lines from his running shorts are obscene against the white of the towel underneath his hips, discarded when he'd stalked out of the bathroom with his usual manic intent. Richie may or may not have a thing for the scary look Eddie always gets in his eyes when he's shouting at cars on the freeway, but then, it's hard to tell. He kind of has a thing for everything about Eddie.

His hips and ass might be fishbelly pale, but Eddie's cock is the same dark, dusky pink as his nipples, the same healthy brown that's blotching to red up his chest and throat. He's so hard, it's bobbing against his stomach. Richie lolls out his tongue to blot at some of the slick welling down the thick, blue-river vein on the underside. It makes Eddie's thighs tremble wider, which in turn makes Richie feel like some kind of dirty god, so he does it again.

"I'm an asshole, but I'm the asshole that's gonna make you come," he says, smudging wet kisses into the crease of Eddie's hip. The fan does little to ease the sultry heat that's clouding Richie's head and his glasses, but it could be more to do with the way he's mindlessly rutting his own hardon against the sheets. "You wanna, Eds? We don't have to—"

"No, c'mon, I want — I want it."

Richie looks up at him in delight, past Eddie's taut, heaving stomach to his determined face. How he manages to be hangdog and hot all at once is a mystery Richie never wants to solve. He looks like somebody's drugged him, all hazy and red with his mouth hanging open, wet with spit.

"I'm one lucky sonofabitch."

Eddie huffs and rakes his nails through Richie's hair. His feet flex, immediately, heat spiking down his spine. "Shut up, can't you just — get on with it?"

"I'm savoring this."

Eddie's foreskin is drawn back already, and isn't *that* just a pleasant surprise every time. Even his cock is a pretty, wrapped gift that keeps on giving. Richie is still happily shocked Eddie didn't volunteer for an

elective chop, after Stan told them it was for hygiene reasons so long ago, so concerned is Eddie with keeping his whole situation clean. Makes things easier too, since Richie's intimately familiar with how they work.

Tastes just like any other part of Eddie, really. Tangy summer skin, kind of like oranges and gasoline at once. Like the beach wanted to cling to his body even after his shower. Fuckin' delicious, in Richie's opinion. It ruffles up delicate like lace, under his pushing tongue, his kisses.

"That's — *oh*." Eddie's hips bow off the bed, and he makes a mewling sort of sound. Like a pinned-down animal. His other hand makes shaky anchor around Richie's nape. "You like the — uh. Right."

"That okay?"

Eddie kneads his hair into a slow mess. "Yeah, just. Not used to it."

Richie would stay here all day, if he could. He'd give Eddie his mouth as many times as he needed. Precome drips down into the dark nestling of curls, and he swallows. "Teenage Richie is dancing the fucking conga right now."

"Great. Fucking great. How about adult Richie, how's he doing?"

"Adult Richie wants to blow you so hard you can't walk tomorrow."

A worried little furrow appears on Eddie's forehead. *God*, he's still so adorable. "Is that possible?"

"Only one way to find out," Richie leers, and leans down to suck the head of Eddie's dick into his mouth.

Eddie's whole body snaps to attention, pinned as he is under Richie's shoulders. He gasps like someone's socked him in the gut, and Richie swallows him deeper just to hear him do it again.

It's been a good few years since Richie's done this, and he'd be lying if he said he wasn't anxious about making it good. He's kind of desperate to make it good for Eddie, to make him realize how good it can be, that he hasn't given up his old life and jumped into

something they're both still kind of terrified of, for nothing.

He probably needn't have worried. Eddie arches into a thrust, his cock nudging thick into the back of Richie's throat. "*Shit*, holy *shit* that's good, *ahh*, *fuck*—"

Richie might pass out from lack of oxygen, but he doesn't care. Let the paramedics find him here, dead from doing what he loves. He grips hard at Eddie's waist, hands slipping through the sweat glittering in the lamp-light and tries bobbing his head slowly, until Eddie's moans go all high pitched and his heels dig into Richie's back.

He smells of clean sweat and his allergen-free shower soap when Richie comes up for air, dragging his tongue through the clear stuff leaking steadily from Eddie's slit.

"Eds," he husks, kissing open-mouthed at the salty tang of Eddie's inner thighs. "Hey, Earth to Spaggetti Head."

"*Ah*, w-what?" Eddie says, faintly. His eyes are dark sinks in his face, as he pushes himself up on one shaky elbow to peer down between his legs. His hand joins Richie's in gently jacking him off, then he's cupping Richie's jaw to touch his slick lower lip again with his thumb.

"S'it good?"

Eddie wheezes out a laugh. The same thrilled, petrified laugh he always did when he went along with Richie's crazy bullshit. Like when he sat too close and fidgety on the swingboat ride at the county fair, alternating between sitting on his hands and grabbing at Richie's shirt with a shriek. Both of them so red, Eddie declared Richie had given him hives, and Richie believed him.

His normally neat hair is fucking *everywhere*, damp from the shower and tousled in a dark crown around his flushed face. "You're gonna kill me, Rich."

"Can you come in my mouth?"

He feels Eddie's pulse beat heavy in the big arteries of his thighs, where they clench like a vice around Richie's ribs. His own erection

is throbbing almost painfully, and he humps into the mattress a little for some bare relief, sweet pressure building tight in his hips.

“Please?”

“Holy shit,” Eddie whispers.

“Is that a yes, or—? I don’t mind, it’s not dirty or anything, but you don’t have to, if — if you’d rather—”

Eddie’s fist clenches gently in his hair again, and he cuts himself off with a moan that burns down into the hungry pit between his thighs. His hairline is gonna recede even more with all this grabbing, and frankly, he can’t wait. Eddie pulls him up until his cock is rubbing sticky trails into the hair on Richie’s stomach, sucks on Richie’s tongue enough that he’s drooling the taste of him between their mouths. He dives into it, going lightheaded with grinding along Eddie’s sweat-silken thigh.

“It’s — if you don’t think it’s gross then just — just keep going, yeah,” Eddie mutters, his voice so sex-deep it’s disconcerting.

“*Fuck* yeah,” Richie grins, and kisses him hard. He shifts down again so he can lick wet into Eddie’s belly button, and feeds the white-hot length of him back into his mouth.

It’s only a couple of minutes later that Eddie shouts out something like a ripped apart version of Richie’s name, when he empties down his throat. Richie’s eyes water as he swallows it all, his jaw a screaming band of ache, his fingers threaded with Eddie’s and squeezing tight. Eddie is a little skeeved out when Richie tries to kiss him after, but he’s still panting come-drunk hickeys into the base of Richie’s throat as he brings him off with a few long, focused strokes.

He doesn’t complain either, when Richie collapses onto him like a cut-string puppet, not until he wiggles around and Richie feels their bellies sticking together with cooling streaks of semen.

“Oh jeeze, ew,” he groans. “Ew, ew, ew, Richie c’mon, get up.”

Richie’s head is still cartwheeling around in space, his hips jerking minutely with aftershocks whenever their cocks squish softly

together. He made *Eddie Kaspbrak* come. In his *mouth*.

“Fine. Ugh.” Richie shifts, all his limbs feeling like jello. He only gets far enough to put a little space between them, the sticky night air flowing through the window’s mesh screen and around their sweat-soaked bodies. He rests his forehead against Eddie’s, and they look at each other until Richie’s gaze starts to swim, Eddie going swirly and impressionist. His skin tingles in the wake of Eddie’s hands, petting slowly down the ladder of his ribs.

He feels sort of elated, and weirdly shy, his belly doing happy somersaults. *I just sucked my boyfriend off.*

“Guess I really am a Trashmouth, huh?”

Eddie flushes hotter against his cheek, and snorts, closing his eyes. “You can say that again.”

“I’ll get a cloth. Toldja you wouldn’t be able to walk.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Eddie mutters, but he’s beaming out from under the arm flung across his face, when Richie staggers sideways into the doorframe on shaky legs, even as he’s flipping him off.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

[Miniatures](#) informs me that "if you swim in the Pacific you can and will get bits of tiny dead crabs in your bathing suit" but who needs REALISM when we know what [BEACH EDDIE LOOKS LIKE](#)

## 8. Chapter 8

### Notes for the Chapter:

this chapter is a little short, and very self-indulgent, but bear with me. we are gearing up for Some Good Shit

Late August continues to bear down on them like a fever dream, with an emphasis on the *fever* part. So hot it's like being sick. Making it worse with the way they can barely keep their hands off each other when they're in the same room, even when it's too hot to touch, and touching feels like dying, like putting their tongues and fingers into each other's bodies is holding them into a fire.

And that's a thing, too. Eddie is, to Richie's eternal hilarity, entirely familiar with the mechanics of how Richie might possibly fuck him, if not with associating it with sex.

"I've had fingers in my ass before, idiot," he says once, unimpressed. His tone is belied by the way he's breathing ragged, and his balls are twitching and heavy in Richie's hand, drawn up neat to his body.

"What?" Richie sputters, because, *what?*

"Ever heard of a doctor? A prostate exam? Cancer? We are *forty* years old, you can never be too careful about that shit," he says, more pompous than Richie thought anyone could sound with their boner so lively it moves by itself. And then, more irate, "What the fuck are *you* laughing at!"

Richie only stops honking like a goose when Eddie's mouth sets in that familiar way, and soon he has Eddie writhing loud and shooting copiously onto his own stomach, with Richie sucking at his taint and two slick fingers buried inside him.

It's all amazing. They do it another three times that week. Richie walks around on air, his own body smarting from the last time, when Eddie wanted to try it the other way around.



Every day the sun crushes them down, like the Earth turning fossils into oil with its own pressure and heat. Eddie's lucky. Working from home leaves him with constant access to the pool, while Richie has to keep heading into the city for meetings, or to check out venues. It becomes a kind of constant low level buzz under his skin, the knowledge that Eddie is waiting at home, more often than not.

Not just the sex, though that is a major part of it, but the way Richie will find himself drifting off during conversations with the sound guys, thinking of Eddie chopping limes at the kitchen counter, Eddie's bat-wing bony feet kicked up on the coffee table and nudging Richie's as they watch TV. The chlorinated slip of his tongue in Richie's mouth as their bodies make gentle waves in the pool. His bellyaching over the latex funk of the condom he *insisted* Richie wore the first time he blew him on the couch, and how he still sucked Richie's brains out anyway. His *worse* bellyaching over the taste of the joint, once Richie convinced him they weren't going to be arrested for smoking a one-skinner in the backyard, in a legal state. The absolute smitten glee Richie felt when Eddie coughed his eyes bloodshot, and took another determined hit. The bashful smile on Eddie's face when the neighbor lady from across the street complimented his cooking, the last time they had a barbecue, and said they'd both found themselves quite the catch. Eddie's split-wide grin when he makes Richie laugh 'til rum sprays out of his nose, and the feral way he chases flies with the hand-held bug zapper, and his sweet body, all Richie's, Eddie, Eddie, *Eddie*.

Derry was cruel to boys like them. It still is. Twenty-seven years since he cried after his first Eddie-shaped wet dream, and Richie still felt like vomiting when Mike told them about that Mellon kid, the one that kicked everything off again back in September. Tipped over the side of the bridge and into the Kenduskeag, like garbage.

So there's a part of him that can still hardly believe it, that he gets to have something so exciting, and yet so *normal*. He never saw domesticity in his future in the first place, let alone that he might find it with the first and only person he ever fell in love with.

He's thinking about it one day, dreamily, when he gets home. The street is still, the air so thick with heat-haze shimmering off the tarmac he feels like he's swimming through the front door.

“Eddie?”

There are no cooking smells wafting from the kitchen, so maybe they’re having take-out. Richie toes off his shoes and leaves his socks in a sweaty pile next to where Eddie’s sneaker collection is neatly lined up in the hall, looking forward to the inevitable argument. The thought makes him smile, stupidly. Even the arguing is great.

“Babe? You home?”

The main part of the house is all open plan, so he can see in an instant that Eddie’s nowhere to be found. There are telltale signs of him though, just like there are all over the rest of the house. Unsurprising, given the number of giant bags Eddie ferried across the country over the long, hot months.

Somehow, the sight of Eddie’s clothes sharing space his closet still makes Richie want to curl into a squealing ball. Along with Eddie’s murder mysteries and self-help books scattered all over the place, neatly filed full of torn-newspaper bookmarks. His FitBit charging on the counter, the printed-out photos of the Losers carefully stuck to the fridge door like they still live in the dial-up age. Richie looks around, at all of it, smiling helplessly and wondering how the fuck he ever lived here, before.

Eddie’s missing, though. Only framed movie posters peer down at Richie in the dusky gloom, preserved in fuzzy VHS permanence. But there’s muffled noise coming from the back yard.

Summer evenings in L.A. are a flood of orange, especially since Richie’s big faux-Spanish colonial faces out west, over the hills. The garden is draped in a gauze of sunset, like grainy 80s film stock, and loud cicada whines drip from the carob trees.

It’s here that he finds Eddie sacked out in his deck chair by the pool, one of Bill’s old thrillers covering his face, and his chest moving peacefully with quiet snores.

Richie claps a hand over his mouth to keep a hold of his laughter. There’s music oozing from the outdoor sound system, some of the slutty hip-hop slow jam stuff that Richie will never stop finding it

hilarious Eddie enjoys. It shouldn't really come as a surprise; Eddie was always a closet New Edition fan back in the nineties. *Dick-riding music*, Richie calls it, if only to watch how it makes Eddie scowl and his ears go red, one dimple popping out in spite of himself.

He whips out his phone, angles it so the camera takes in the city spilling down to the sea. Foregrounding Eddie, the lean, shirtless stretch of him taking up the bottom half of the picture.

There's a cathedral in France, one Richie visited on a road trip he took after a presenting gig at Cannes. It had only been a few short weeks since his father's grey Chicago funeral, maybe that's what had him wandering inside in a fit of nostalgic, halfhearted Catholicism. He'd never seen so much gold in one place, gilded murals blazing up every wall like banks of shining cloud, saints and Old Testament angels haloed in fiery resplendence. His neck ached when he left, from craning it until he felt like he was going even more blind than he already was.

The world was so beautiful, he remembers thinking. So much of it. A sweet, fleshy apple surrounding the rotten smear of smalltown America at the very core of Richie's memory, slipping further from him every day.

*Eddie looks like those angels*, he thinks, glad the man himself is asleep, and can't make fun of the sappy look he can feel on his face.

It's a good picture, though the golden hour can turn anything into Instagram-bait. But Eddie looks like a wet dream. Sprawled out loose with the barest hint of definition on his stomach, the unmistakable impressions of Richie's fingers bruised into his obliques. Dark garlands of hickeys low on his collarbones, usually covered. Veins roping down his forearms, picked out by the lens-flare, and his tan line visible high on his thigh where his running shorts are riding up. It could be the way Richie feels like he has X-ray vision when it comes to Eddie's dick, because of how much time he spends looking at it, but he's pretty sure the shorts aren't leaving much to the imagination either.

*Nice view*, Richie captions it, and adds about two dozen fire emojis. He hits the post button, and moves to crouch beside the chair.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty.” Eddie’s shoulder is warmed-through when he shakes it gently. There’s no parasol covering him, so he must not have intended to fall asleep. “C’mon sweetheart, pretty sure your turkey’s done.”

“Hnnh,” Eddie mumbles.

Richie plucks the book off his face, something too tender to name unfurling in his chest at the sight of Eddie blinking awake, eyelashes a sooty smudge against his cheek. All freckles and dimples and pretty as a goddamn picture. One superimposed from nearly thirty years ago, when this same sight would make Richie’s heart trill like a hummingbird’s wings, until he was sure he’d pass out right there in the hammock.

“Hi, there.”

“Hi, Rich. You’re home,” Eddie says throatily, and his movements are so floppy as he rubs his eyes, his smile so unguarded in the way he still hardly ever is, that Richie has to kiss him. Because he can. Because this is something that is given to him now, day after day, and he’s spent too much of his life hiding from what he wants to ever waste it.

It’s slow, and a little difficult because of the angle and the way Eddie is yawning a pungent cloud of banana-breath into it, but it’s perfect regardless. Richie’s heart leapfrogs as he feels arms wrap around his neck like vines, like Eddie’s some affectionate snake who’s been camped out under a heat lamp. His good mood probably has something to do with the fact that his divorce settlement finally came through in the mail that morning, but Richie hopes it’s also a little to do with Eddie loving him back.

He flicks his tongue out to lick at Eddie’s top lip, faintly salty and faintly rough with stubble. Then kisses his nose. “You want Chinese tonight?”

“You’re a real genius, y’know.”

“I try.”

The song has changed, pulsing out quietly around the yard in something equally slow and good for grinding to. Richie's mind slips down into the gutter with the lyrics as he watches Eddie stretch, twisting his back around with a few cracks.

"Fuck, I didn't mean to fall asleep. If I get melanoma I'm sending you the medical bill. Why is it always so hot in this goddamn state?"

"It's just because you're here this year, Eddie Spaghetti. L.A. wasn't ready for Hot Stuff Kaspbrak."

"Ah, of course," Eddie nods. He slips his hand under Richie's shirt to press a hot brand against his lower back, hooks his fingers into Richie's pants and lets himself be towed back indoors.

It isn't until later, when they're digesting on the couch, that Eddie's phone pings a few times.

Richie ignores his muttering until the loud, squawking, "What the fuck!" nearly has him hurling the remote through the TV in fright.

Apparently Beverly, Ben, *and* their dear leader William took it upon themselves to send Eddie a host of smirking texts. Mike is Richie's only true friend from now on, he swears it.

Eddie chases him around the house, yelling, and the photo already has hundreds of comments, tens of thousands of likes by the time he comes crashing to the living room rug, Eddie on top of him. There's probably even an innuendo-laden TMZ article by now, another in a long nosy line, all with titles like *Bi-Bi Closet: Trashmouth Tozier's New Mystery BF Is HOT, So Why Does Nobody Know His Name?*

They usually feature a photo of the two of them looking disgustingly happy and overwarm in terrible clothes, carrying groceries or walking Oliver the Dalmatian. Richie makes a game out of replying to his thirsty Twitter mentions whenever someone feels the need to send him the links, firing back something like *idk who that is but if someone could get me his number that wld be great. ca\$h reward*. One of them was just Eddie out running in his tiny shorts, back to the camera and

flipping off the paparazzi over his shoulder.

Richie jerked off to it the last time Eddie went back to New York, because he's an adult and he's allowed, and because porn just doesn't cut it any more.

Eddie manages to wrestle the phone from his hands, and then makes Richie show him how to delete the post, because Eddie fights dirty and he knows how much Richie can't stand being tickled.

Despite this, his good mood extends into the next day, when he lets Richie take a selfie with him in the garden. They're framed by the bright, macaw-blue sky, Richie grinning like a Chinese parade lion with his glasses reflecting the sun. He's got his arm hooked around Eddie's shoulder, and Eddie's covering his face until only his nervous smile and one soulful brown eye are visible, his head tucked beneath Richie's chin.

*Spaghetti's only straight until u get it hot and wet*, is the caption, and Richie catches a pointy elbow hard in the ribs for it. The likes pour in, even more than the last one, and Eddie winds up getting it framed.

## Notes for the Chapter:

the cathedral Richie visited in France is La Basilique Notre Dame de Fourvière in Lyon, which i visited this past June with my pal and beta reader [elephantastic](#), and it is truly amazing

the songs Eddie's asleep to are probably [this](#) and [this](#) because my friends and i really do have a shared "dick-riding playlist" and you'll pry this headcanon from my cold dead hands. richie's views do not represent the views of the author. EDIT: a lot of people have been asking for a link to the playlist, so [here it is lmao](#)

and finally, i am a huge freak for "one person is

famous" AUs so having it actually be canon that Richie is famous is like catnip to me, that's why this chapter is self-indulgent. all that fanart of them being an idiot couple on instagram is just \*chef's kiss\*

## 9. Chapter 9

“So, Patty Uris wants to have us all down in Atlanta next month. Six weeks or so. Can you guys believe it’s nearly been a *year*?”

“Every day feels like a ye-ah without you, Mikey mah deah,” Richie says, blowing a kiss to the laptop camera.

“Are you doing the Southern Belle right now, or the British Guy?” Ben asks, over the tinny distortion of Bev’s laughter.

“The fact that you can’t tell them apart should really tell him something, you’d think,” Eddie says wearily, from beside Richie.

Mike’s grin is huge, even miniaturized in the little window where Skype splits the screen into three. “Does he still do the Brooklyn Mob Guy, Eddie? How do you stand it?”

Bill and Eddie both groan in chorus, which is pretty fucking rude, in Richie’s opinion.

“Can we focus, please?” Bill says. “We don’t want a repeat of last week. I didn’t think Cards Against Humanity could get that disgusting.”

“Yeah, Richie, honey, please don’t do the Voices on Skype, it makes our cats shred the curtains.”

“Screw you, Marsh,” Richie laughs, flipping them all off with both hands. “Mike, what were you saying about Atlanta?”

“I said, Patty wants us all there for the anniversary memorial, and I’m gonna be there that week anyway. Grad school starts the week after, so I’m doing some research for me and Bill’s book. I can pick you guys up from the airport, if you can make it.”

They all agree on dates, and then Bev’s launching into a story about all the clients she’s designing for now, up in the Hamptons with Ben. Richie looks down at the near-invisible scar on his left palm, rubbing it absently and thinking about Patricia Uris, about Stan. It was bad enough, learning they’d all lost Stan just as soon as they could



remember him again, but Patty... Patty had known him far longer. Known him in his adulthood, the way they never would. What must it feel like, to lose the person you wanted to spend the rest of your life with?

His fist clenches involuntarily around the scar, his stomach plummeting at the thought. A muscle twitches in his cheek.

He'd come far too close to knowing. His nightmares aren't just of a hole where a heart should be, dead skewered meat. They're choking, suffocating, Richie hung crucified in the dark and not doing a goddamn thing to stop it from happening.

He's distracted from his increasingly melancholy mood when Eddie starts fidgeting around on the couch beside him.

"What's got your panties in a bunch?"

"Fuck off, I'm — did you leave the back door open? I'm getting eaten alive by mosquitos here," Eddie snaps, under his breath. He's scratching vigorously up the leg of his shorts, and Richie snorts at him.

"Don't scratch 'em then, it activates the malaria." Eddie's eyes go all big and panicky, and his hand jerks abruptly out of his shorts. "It's probably crabs, Eds."

"If it's crabs, I got them from you."

"Don't say I never give you anything nice."

"You give me a goddamn headache, is what you give me!"

"Well, you give me tooth decay from all the sweet things you say."

"You're so not funny. You've never once been funny, why the fuck are you a comedian again?"

"It's for all the sweet ass I get with my comedy money. And, I must be funny, because you hate my jokes and you have no sense of humor."

“Get — get off me, God, I’m gonna sign you up to run that marathon with me, hopefully you’ll die of exertion and I’ll get some peace and quiet—”

“If I die — ow, *stop*, if I die I’m kicking you out of the house!”

“Fuck you, Trashmouth!”

“Chickenshit, come fuck me yourself—”

There’s four loud throat-clearings from the laptop, startling them out of the vicious headlock Eddie has him in. Four pairs of eyebrows raised at them, judging.

“Beep beep... both of you? Boy, that feels weird to say,” Bill grins. It looks like it’s already dark on the east coast, but even in the shadows he’s looking less and less haggard with guilt every week they all talk.

An entire year since It nearly had them all for breakfast, goddamn. Eddie’s still pressed against his side, as Richie’s heart calms down again. How shit changes, and yet doesn’t really change at all.

“Sorry Bill,” Eddie mumbles, his face going bright red in an instant. Richie smirks at him, re-adjusting his glasses from where they’re knocked askew.

“It’s fine, guys,” Bev says kindly, though she looks just as shit-eatingly smug as the other three. “Stupid’s gotta stick together. We get it, and we’re happy for you both. We’ve all seen Richie’s Instagram stories.”

“I haven’t,” Eddie says, folding his arms huffily.

*Man*, he’s in a mood. Richie elbows him. “Whose fault is that? I keep telling you to get one.”

“I don’t *want* one, what would I even do with it?”

“Follow me?”

“I see you every day!”

Richie pulls a face, pretends to think for a second. "Post dick pics?"

"I'm literally going to kill you in your sleep."

"Guys!"

They turn in unison back to the screen. Bill just has his head buried in his hands, and the two lovebirds are busy losing it. Seriously, Mike is Richie's *best* best friend.

"Sorry Micycle, continue. *Some* of us get cranky with the heat."

"God," Bev wheezes, wiping her eyes. "We're just *saying*, you guys look really happy, tonight not included. You both look good. You're so tan, Eddie, I'm jealous."

Eddie goes all pink again across the bridge of his nose, stuttering something about the heatwave. He was always shy about getting compliments from girls, they all were. It was part and parcel of being not just a kid, but a Loser, though Richie remembers the distinctly uneasy feeling he used to get whenever Eddie blushed around Bev. He was only supposed to be like that around *Richie*, no wonder jealousy sunk its teeth in. It makes sense in hindsight, of course.

He makes a mental note to say more nice things to him, and prods at Eddie's bare thigh in apology where it's pressed against Richie's, tickling his leg hair.

Eddie looks at him sideways, and gently takes hold of Richie's finger, out of frame and out of sight from the others. *That's right*, Richie thinks, triumphantly.

"He does look good, doesn't he?" Richie crows. "He's like a baby deer, but sexy. Like if Bambi somehow got turned into a twunk."

The speakers crackle with loud guffaws, Eddie's eyes widen with fury, and suddenly he's wrenching Richie's finger back, pain jolting up his hand.

"Ow, fuck!"

"What's a twunk?" Ben asks.

“What is *with* you tonight?”

“It’s speaking to these chucklefucks,” Richie gestures at the screen, wildly. “It brings it out in me! I’m sorry, Eddie let go, Jesus—”

Conversation meanders for the rest of the call, drifting on a gentle current from jokes, to plans, to half-forgotten memories of life in Derry. Deep orange light is filling their living room by the time they’re all yawning, which means it must be almost the middle of the night for the others.

The couch sags in the middle, tipping them together heavy and warm. Eddie is picking absently at the hem of Richie’s shorts, and Richie’s keeping one eye on him, and the other on the screen, where Bill is having an animated argument with Eddie and Mike about horror movie endings.

It’s because of this split attention that he sees Eddie track the movement, when Ben stretches, and puts his arm around Bev’s shoulders. The gesture is so casual, so practiced and intimate, it’s clearly something they do without thinking.

Richie can *feel* Eddie thinking. It’s something he’s familiar with, Eddie’s whole body giving off a vibe like a hamster in a wheel. And then all he can feel is the deliberate way Eddie shifts, wraps his arm around Richie in a half-hug that makes him feel like his lungs are spilling over with warm honey, sugary-sweet and full.

His head is practically on Eddie’s shoulder, slumped as they are into the worn cushions. Richie drifts for a while, listening to the sounds of his friends, and the gentle *scritch* of Eddie’s fingers on his scalp, trailing sparks down the back of his neck. Puts his hand to Eddie’s stomach, feeling like he could melt.

“I meant what I said, you guys,” Bev says tiredly, just before they all sign off. “You look really happy.”

“Yeah,” Eddie replies, before Richie can say anything. His voice is a little scratchy, and his grip tightens around Richie’s body. A meteor

could hit them right now, and Richie wouldn't care. "Yeah, we are."

Later, the bedroom is lit in bands of shadow from the shutters when Eddie crowds him up against the wall. Lazy heat swills in Richie's gut, makes his chest tight as Eddie ruts against his thigh, urged on by Richie's hand rubbing down the cleft of his ass over his shorts

"You're giving me a wedgie," Eddie gasps against his throat, his thumbs digging into Richie's shoulders. He goes up on his toes and they're kissing wet and slow, Richie pulling Eddie up against him by the waistband.

He shivers, his cock fattening up so quickly in his underwear his head spins. "You're giving me a boner, Eds, tit for tat."

Richie barely has time to catch his breath. Eddie's ruthless efficiency even extends to undressing, which shouldn't be as hot as it is. There's something about the jerky movements of Eddie hurriedly folding a shirt that drives Richie wild as he's yanking his own underwear off. He can't help it.

Maybe Eddie is conditioning him to be neater? With orgasms? *If so, it's fucking working*, Richie thinks with his tongue thick in his mouth, watching Eddie crawl towards him where he's leaning against the pillows.

"Here," Eddie says, the bottle of lube cold when it thumps onto Richie's chest. "You do it."

"Yessir," Richie gulps, watching Eddie settle his ass neatly on Richie's thighs, his beautiful cock flushed full, up to his navel. Eddie can be fickle about whether or not the lube grosses him out, but Richie *really* doesn't mind. "Turn the light on, I can't see shit."

He's warming some of it in his hand as Eddie leans over him towards the lamp, and his chest is right there, so Richie pulls him closer around the small of his back to latch his mouth wet against a flat nipple.

"*Fuck*," Eddie rasps succinctly, his hips kicking forward. Their

erections slide together hot, and Richie feels a rush behind his eyelids, makes him greedy, sucking hard at Eddie's chest. Then Eddie's pushing up and away, hands planted on either side of Richie's pounding head. "Stop, you'll make me come too quick."

"That's kinda the goal, babe," Richie grins. He can't help from jostling Eddie a little with his own thrusts upwards, he just looks like too damn much. His big worried eyes all glazed, and his tight stomach muscles rippling with the circles he's grinding into Richie's hips. "What d'you want? You want my fingers?"

"You," Eddie chokes out. Richie feels his own cock blurt out a mess of precome, slicking them both. "Want you. Always have, always will."

The room itself feels like it's moving, the walls throbbing in on them with heat. Richie laughs again in bright disbelief, squeezes one cheek of Eddie's ass until he moans, until he feels how Richie wants him, too. "Won't lie, Eds, that sounds pretty fatalistic."

Eddie huffs in annoyance, wiping his sweaty face with one arm, his hips moving relentlessly. "I'm being nice, asshole."

"I felt it. My dick feels extremely nice right now. You gotta tell me what you want, c'mon."

"Just — just this, look—"

The sight of Eddie arching his body to lean back on Richie's leg nearly undoes him, worse still when he takes Richie's slick hand and spreads it all over their cocks, lying snug together on Richie's shuddering stomach.

"Yeah," Eddie says, hushed. Richie takes them both in hand, makes a tight circle for Eddie to fuck forward into. Grips the bedsheets with the other, the cotton squeaking as his arm shakes. "Yeah, that's — *fuck*, Jesus, Richie—"

He doesn't know where to look. His face burns, staring up at Eddie gnawing his lower lip, the low light picking out the freckles on his hunched-in shoulders. It's like itching all over, he's so turned on it hurts, feels like there's something huge and hot low down in his

stomach that wants to shove itself out, pound into Eddie's body until they can't separate. But he can't. Eddie's running the show, and right now he's raking his nails through Richie's chest hair in livid scores of heat.

His thrusts slow down a little, and Richie's grabbing desperately at his hip before he can think.

"Don't — don't stop, Eddie, fuck—"

"I'm getting cramp," Eddie pants out, weakly. His thighs shake as Richie rubs them, massaging the straining tendons of his groin that frame his sack, the neat nest of his pubic hair. The day-old stubble rash on the insides of his legs. He never lets Richie get a clean shave. "Take a break, cowboy."

Richie swallows the knot in his throat. He's gonna come so hard he'll cry, he can feel it. His skin is tight, and overheated, and his cock keeps jumping when he feels the drag of Eddie's foreskin through the slick there, smearing around the tip.

"So," Eddie says. He looks about as red as Richie feels, and his mouth waters as Eddie pushes his sweaty hair back from his forehead. "I'm like *a baby deer but sexy*, huh?"

"Would you prefer if I'd called ya Sam Eagle?"

Eddie bares his teeth, his nose scrunching up. "Stop corrupting our childhood."

Richie snorts, and pulls at his hips, guiding him into a filthy simulacrum of a fuck. "I calls 'em like I sees 'em, Bambi."

"If I'm Bambi, then you're a fucking skunk," Eddie says, before tipping forward and nipping at Richie's mouth, whining when Richie works his hand down to grip them both again. "Fuckin' Trashmouth," he whispers hotly, and Richie's smiling too hard to suck face.

Even his legs are throbbing, pleasure shooting up from his heels to the bright, heavy pulse behind his balls every time their thrusts line up. Eddie grits out curses and winds his fingers into the hair behind Richie's ears, kissing him 'til his glasses come off, licking at Richie's

back teeth. His skin is ablaze everywhere Eddie's plastered naked up against him, his knuckles brushing the hair on their stomachs with every stroke, heart screaming in his chest. He flattens his hand to the rolling small of Eddie's back to feel him humping forward, dips his fingers into the line of his crack, and Eddie *keens*.

"Seems like — seems like you think I'm pretty hot too, Eds," he gasps out. Eddie groans like he's been shot, when Richie swipes his thumb around the head of his cock on every upstroke.

"Fucking — well done, genius."

"C'mon," Richie slurs, licks a stripe along Eddie's fuzzy jaw. "Tell me."

"*Christ*, I — wanted to jump you, first night back in Derry—"

"No shit, me too!"

"Shut up, yeah — thought, God he's *tall*, stupid fucking face the same, *ahh*," Eddie whimpers. Then he's slipping his thumb into Richie's kiss-slack mouth, like he's inspecting a horse. "Never get dental, alright? Used to jerk off to this overbite when we were kids."

"You're so fucking *weird*," Richie cries muffled around his thumb, delighted, biting down gently on the knuckle.

"Your fault," Eddie says, sounding like he's completely hammered, looks like it too. His chest heaves when he sits up again, blushing all down his stomach as he shoves his hips hard against Richie, who can't take it anymore, and comes in overwhelming waves all over his hand and both their cocks, until it feels like someone scooped out his insides and filled him up with blinding light. He moans, long and low, fingers digging into the ridge of Eddie's spine.

"God yeah, that's — *Rich*—"

He watches, spellbound and still jerking like a caught fish as Eddie pushes a fingertip through the white spill of semen, smearing it into Richie's skin. Slow, like he's fascinated, and even though Richie's just *come* he still feels consumed at the sight. Eaten alive by heat, something huge closing jaws between his legs, wrapped from his



belly button to his tailbone and sucking him clean like a crab claw.

He moves his hand quicker.

Eddie sort of — convulses, crying out and curling in on himself. The ridges of muscle along his thighs tensing as he squeezes them around Richie's middle. He gasps a few times and follows moments after, pressing against the hollow of Richie's hip, and through his own whirling aftershocks Richie feels hot wetness slipping down his inner thigh, to the sheets.

They cling to each other. Eddie's a dead weight, leaning hard on the gentle curve of Richie's stomach.

Eddie makes some pretty goofy faces during sex, especially when he comes. Richie doesn't say a goddamn thing about it, because his own are probably just as bad, and because he doesn't ever want Eddie to stop.

That Eddie still wants to have sex with him despite (or apparently, *because of*) his own weird, buck-tooth face is a high-octane boost to Richie's ego, like none other he's encountered in life. And he's a comedian. Ego boosts are pretty much the only reason to do it.

"What the fuck was *that*," Richie says, emphatically, meaning all of it. It's been a weird night ever since the Skype call connected.

Eddie's still kneeling over him with his thighs splayed wide, his head hanging low between his winged-out shoulders as he pants, mouth open. Ass softly jerking forward every so often to pulse out a last dribble of come, when Richie rubs circles into his belly, strokes him through the last of it.

His heart is still doing the goddamn can-can when Eddie squints up at him eventually, sweat dripping into one eye, and his smug grin a triumphant white comet tail in his sun-weathered face.

"Just felt like it," he shrugs. "Wanted to show you who's boss. You always make me crazy, but it's worse in front of the others. Makes me feel like we're kids again, and I wanna punch you and kiss you at the same time."

His hands are firm when they slide up Richie's arms, currently slung low around Eddie's middle. His usual frantic patter slows to soft molasses, like he wants to get something right. "And... with them, it's like... I know they're not gonna give us shit, because they get it. They always did. They get why I'm out here with you, and they're okay with it, and — and it just reminds me not to take it for granted, I guess. I'm so lucky, but I spend so much time worryin' about shit that I take it for granted. We survived that clown bullshit *twice*, y'know? And I got my best friends back. I got you back."

"Eds..." Richie says, tightening his hold. He feels like he's got a Las Vegas fountain in his chest, happiness dancing around in long, arcing sprays of light.

"I like you a whole fuckin' lot, and they should know that. You deserve it. Even when you're making it difficult and being a dumbass." The words rush out of Eddie in one breath, his eyes locked somewhere around Richie's collarbones. The skin on Richie's forearms is turning bloodless around Eddie's fingers, and Richie pulls him off balance so he can kiss him again off-center, too hard and sweet, like a sugar cube.

Richie's never felt like he deserves a single good thing he has in his life. A comedy career is ninety-nine percent connections and being in the right place at the right time. And Eddie, well — Eddie still feels like a fluke, like Richie will wake up one day from one of his Deadlight dreams with his bed just as empty as his heart, but here they are. Eddie on top of him, tugging at his bottom lip with his teeth, pressing him into the sheets they picked out together.

"*Baby deer* my ass," Eddie grouses, against his mouth.

"I meant that in the most flattering way possible. You're just so fucking *cute*." He pinches Eddie's cheek, and it initiates a small slap-fight.

"I'm not *cute*, I'm a dude! I mean, I'm a grown man, I have a job!"

"You hate your job!"

"It *pays* well — wait, that's not the point, I'm an adult—"

“Oh yeah, I forgot, only an adult who’s had the fun sucked out of him by *aliens* could have your job. You’re lucky you’re cute.”

“Fuck you.” Eddie glares at him from where Richie’s got him pinned by the wrists to the bed. He knows he’s grinning like a demon when he feels Eddie’s legs wrap around his waist, heavy and languid, post-orgasm.

“Fuck you back. I already *told* you man, when I say you’re cute, I mean it in the schoolgirl sense, like *oh that actor on TV is so cute, he looks just like Eddie Kaspbrak in Home Ec, I wish he’d raw me behind the bleachers—*”

“*You* sat next to me in Home Ec.”

“Exactly.”

“Shut up,” Eddie snickers, rolling his eyes. He leans up to lick Richie’s smile into a kiss. “I get it. I wanted to go behind the bleachers with you, too. Let me up, I got jizz all over me.”

The shower is big enough for both of them, so they save water and go Dutch. Richie’s too fucked-out to do more than palm Eddie’s round ass and kiss his wet hair before they’re stepping out to dry.

“That was so hot, tonight,” he murmurs a little later, sweat already prickling in the crooks of his knees as the muggy August darkness settles around them. “I really love the shit out of you.”

“Mhm,” Eddie replies, sounding half-asleep. He snuffles against Richie’s bare shoulder. Exhaustion turns him cuddlier, and the leaden-soft weight of his arm around Richie’s waist is motivation enough for Richie to keep wearing him out. They might die from the heat, but everybody’s gotta die from something.

“We could fuck like that, if you wanted. You could fuck me like that, if that would be better. I think about riding that dick in my sleep.”

Eddie stiffens a little, and Richie feels his breath pick up against his neck, rippling his skin into goosebumps.

“I, uh. Well, I kinda wanted to — I kinda thought you’d. Uh.” Eddie

clears his throat. Even in the dark Richie can feel his cheeks burning, blood-hot.

And okay, they haven't fucked yet. Not *fucked* fucked, and although Richie's suddenly got a more active sex life than at any other point in his existence, it's all about trajectory. When Eddie moved in, he couldn't even hold Richie's hand. It's about extrapolation, which Richie has always been good at, it's how you come up with a good comedy routine. It's about orbit, and how the two of them seem to be on a collision course towards something huge, and even more life defining than vanquishing an ancient extraterrestrial evil underneath their hometown. Something that started literally decades before, when Richie fell in love and never stopped.

Obviously he'd never ask Eddie to do anything he didn't want to, but the point is this. There's a whole host of things Richie never got to try in his adolescence, because of Derry, and because he was sure the only person he wanted to try them with would rather shoot himself in the head. So maybe he lets his imagination run away with him, sometimes. He's relishing every day with Eddie, like a teenager finding a skin-mag in the woods.

But in, like, a romantic sense.

He reaches blindly in the dark to stroke slowly down from Eddie's throat, down through his pubic hair to gently cup where he's soft, and warm.

"Eds?"

The small cough comes again. "Kinda always imagined, you'd be the one to..."

Send for a fucking ambulance, because Richie's having a pulmonary. Open up the pearly gates, Lord, it's happening, Richie Tozier's coming and he's ready to get kicked down into the Pit where he belongs.

"Eddie?"

"Don't make me say it, I can't even say it yet."

“If you’re not mature enough to say it, you’re not mature enough to be doing it,” Richie sing-songs, palming around to hold Eddie closer by the butt.

“Oh my God. ”

“Eddie-kins, you wanna get *fucked*, don’t you?”

“Go to *sleep*,” Eddie hisses, burrowing his hot face into Richie’s chest. And he does, once he stops laughing.

### Notes for the Chapter:

god eddie is soooo smart. i also want to sit on bill hader's overbite

you may have noticed the chapter count has gone up from 12 to 14. this is because i severely underestimated how many emotions richie has. i'm [@skinks](#), you know it lads

## 10. Chapter 10

### Notes for the Chapter:

going into this chapter i need people to know that [these are the dungarees](#) eddie's wearing, so you can picture how godtang cute he is

The hottest day of the year comes slamming into L.A. like a freight train from hell, during September's Indian summer.

Instead of spending it in the pool, or maybe exchanging lazy handjobs in front of the open refrigerator door, Richie and Eddie are out trudging around the Grove mall. In any case, the pool is currently moonlighting as a bone-dry graveyard for the dessicated husks of dead cicadas, on account of the drought.

It's more like being at the zoo than going to the *actual* zoo is. Richie would know; Eddie loves the monkeys so much he got them both season tickets. Says they remind him of Richie, only cleaner. Anyway, the Grove is equally as loud and kaleidoscopic with color, the cinnamon smell of frying dough and a million other food stalls carrying far on the heat-thickened air.

Oliver the Dalmatian's owners just got engaged, is the thing, and they need to find a gift. And since Eddie doesn't trust him to buy things online any more, not since the life-sized Predator statue found a home in their garage next to the ping-pong table, here they are. Because Eddie *still* doesn't get that you won't find the real unique, heartfelt shit in L.A. in the kind of place that has walking tours. Plus, their neighbors are *giant* west coast hippies, and probably won't allow anything into their home that wasn't handcrafted in the desert using sustainably sourced materials. At least Eddie has someone to talk to about trail-mix, and like... backpacks.

Whatever, he's cute when he's being a tourist. Richie still gets to feel like a puffed up cockerel when he points out some old film location, and Eddie enthuses like the little Maine bumpkin he still is, at heart. The one who made it his and Richie's teenage mission to rent out Derry's entire paltry video store if it killed them.

Richie droops in the shade of a store awning, breathing with his mouth wide open like that will somehow ventilate his body any better. Screw the monkeys, he should've been a gator. Lying around in the cool mud all day. Eating chickens whole. Sounds like a sweet deal, aside from the part about living in Florida. He could do that that weird mating burp thing at Eddie in the pool.

He drags his hands down his damp face, feeling rivulets of sweat course down his back under his shirt. *Must be going delirious*. The goddamn Grove, on the hottest Saturday afternoon of the year.

"Here," Eddie says, reappearing suddenly at his elbow.

"Oh, thank God. You're my fuckin' savior," Richie groans, feverishly unwrapping his popsicle.

"I know. Try to remember that, next time it's your turn to take out the garbage." Eddie's looking a little limp himself, like a plant left too long in a greenhouse, his ugly Thundercats t-shirt gone see-through in patches all down his back. He sticks his hands on his hips, peering around the bustling plaza like the perfect gift is just gonna leap straight into their arms.

"You didn't get one too?"

"No. You eat way too much fucking sugar, all your teeth are gonna fall out."

Richie leers at him, slobbering over the popsicle extra-loud to make Eddie's ears go red. "No teeth makes it easier to do *this*."

Eddie's eyes widen into scandalized saucers, and he grimaces apologetically at two women who give them *looks* as they walk past. "Please stop."

"Eddie, look, I can deepthroat it."

"I'm gonna leave you here."

"Aw c'mon, you know you can't live without this mouth. Hey, wait!"

By the time he catches up to Eddie's killer powerwalk, the popsicle is

already dripping down his wrist, sticky red trails of ice-blood. The crowds shift and flow around them like silt around rocks in a riverbed, everyone peeling sweat and acting like they wouldn't all murder each other just for the sun to cut them some *slack*.

He almost runs into Eddie's back, knocking him forward a little where he's leaning on the marble wall of the fountain. Eddie's hip is the perfect shape for grabbing, so Richie does, pinching him gently under his horribly cute overalls. Loose, plain blue denim, and cut off at the knees. As if Richie doesn't already have enough problems not groping him in public. He keeps his hand there, pleased with how he hasn't had his toes stomped yet, until he realizes what's got Eddie feeling as tense as a war summit.

There's a clown. On the other side of the fountain.

It should feel stupid, the immediate dread that wraps sick tentacles around him.

It should be unnecessary. They never really talk about the bad parts of Derry any more, none of them do, but maybe they *should*. It's not as if Eddie can tell his therapist the real reason he has to comfort Richie's occasional sobbing in the middle of the night, or what he was doing when he got the livid scar on his cheek. His thin face still often has the look of someone terrified of what's behind every door, what's in every closet.

As for Richie himself, well... they all saw things nobody should have to. Even if he got his own therapist, he could never admit that sometimes he remembers the juddering impact in his arm from the axe cleaving open Bowers' skull, and he has to retch into the sink until it feels like his eyes leak stomach acid. The world has real nightmares, unknowable evils undulating around just under the surface of everyday life, and the only thing Richie has found that makes it any easier to deal with, is making jokes on a brightly lit stage. It's a different kind of Deadlights, when people are laughing *with* you. That, and purging himself of the fear a little more every day, replacing it with California sunshine and the feeling he gets from the first soft, unfiltered smile he receives from Eddie in the morning.

Balloon animals. Grotesque little mangled bubble creatures, the



grating squeaks of the plastic shooting directly at them across the fountain like poison darts. Richie's chest cavity shrinks down very small, suffocating his heart as he watches the clown. It doesn't even look like Pennywise.

Then Eddie breathes out a shaky little laugh, and the tension leaks out of him under Richie's palm like the sweat that's visibly trickling down his neck. He grins sheepishly when Richie catches his eye, and suddenly Richie can breathe again too.

"It's fine," Eddie says, slapping his hands on the marble decisively. "We're fine. This is fine."

Richie nods, leaning beside him. The wall is so blistering against his bare arms it feels like being cooked. One year on, and time has already healed up so much hurt. Love, too, Richie can't forget that; the real nitro-grade level shit.

He can't wait to see what they can heal into, with the rest of their lives.

"Oh yeah, it's totally fine," he says, nonchalant.

"We killed It *dead* this time, man, smoked that fucker. No way It's in Cali."

"Yep. We're the only ones dumb enough to be here when it's this fucking hot."

"How would It even get out here, anyway? You think It ever flew coach? I'd pick that flight over Delta any day of the week."

Richie laughs until he's snorting, basking in the pleased creases Eddie gets around his eyes whenever he gets off a good chuck.

"Gimme some of that popsicle, it's melting." Eddie holds his hand out expectantly.

"I can't wait 'til we have to take our dentures out to kiss," Richie says, handing it over. "Rot away, babe."

Eddie pulls a face at him, one eyebrow raised. And then he's—

Fuck, he's—

Richie's face goes impossibly hotter, watching the flat drag of Eddie's pink tongue up the ice. Cheeks hollow, as he sucks the thing achingly slow until the burst-pomegranate red of it turns to white, the tiny chips of ice on his lower lip have Richie feeling like a lecherous old wolf from a Tex Avery cartoon. His eyes might well have hearts beating out of his pupils, because Eddie frowns up at him, pulling the stick out of his mouth with an obscene *pop* that Richie feels right down to his toes.

"What?"

"Eds, it's only funny when I do it!" Richie yelps, trying to lean his hand on the wall and missing completely. He stumbles, crowding into Eddie's side. "You're too hot to do that in public, it's — I can't believe I'm saying this, but *stop*—"

"Stop what?" Eddie says innocently, like his dimples are some kind of get-out-of-jail-free card. "I'm just eating it. You gave it to me."

"You're *fellating it*," Richie says, feeling desperate. There's a trickle of juice on Eddie's chin, and he's two seconds from causing an incident.

"No I'm not?"

"You're making me jealous of a *snack*."

Eddie's politely bemused smile goes wolfish. "Now you know how it feels."

"You motherfucker, I *knew* it—"

"Excuse me?"

Richie jumps out of Eddie's personal space with a start, suddenly remembering where they are. Not that it would be the first time people have seen him horny in public, but these days everyone has a camera phone.

Speaking of, there's a young, dark haired woman clutching one like a lifeline right in front of them, biting her lip as she looks between

their startled faces.

“Uh, hi?” Richie says, at the same time as Eddie mutters, “How long was she standing there?” from the corner of his mouth. Richie swats him in the arm.

“Hi, um, not long, I promise — I’m really sorry, are you Richie Tozier?”

Richie blinks, his brain kicking back into gear. “Yes. Yeah, sorry, I am. How you doing?”

The girl’s nervous expression transforms immediately, smiling so wide as she shakes his proffered hand that it’s humbling.

This part of being semi-famous will never stop feeling odd to Richie, having strangers be happy to see him, instead of their eyes glazing over as they tune him out. She’s dressed like some kind of cool hipster witch, all dangling moon jewellery and way too much black for how punishing the sun is. It’s endearing, even if Richie is a little concerned she’ll get heatstroke. A fellow goth in the wild. Richie hasn’t been a goth since the nineties, and even then he could never shake his love for eye-wateringly ugly shirts. If anything he was more grunge-lite, but it’s the mentality that counts.

“I’m great, t-thank you!” She keeps adjusting the wide brim of her black hat. “I just — I just wanted to say I loved your special? On Netflix? I watched it with my girlfriend and we both cried.”

“Oh man, thank you,” Richie laughs. “From how hilarious it was, I hope? I don’t wanna get, uh, cancelled for emotionally damaging people. That’s the word, right?”

“No, yeah, for sure! It’s so funny. But it was the stuff you said about growing up in a small place, and like, coming out. It was so validating.”

She’s so young. Probably wasn’t even born when Richie moved to Chicago and discovered experimenting didn’t quite mean the end of the world, but she still finds his bullshit relevant. His heart swells up with a funny sort of pride he’s unused to.

“Everyone in my dorm loves it. We all quote your bit about losing your gay virginity versus your straight one. Like, all the time.”

“Jesus, don’t tell me that. It’s gross enough when *I* say it, you’re all gonna get kicked outta class.” He beams at her. The new special is finally all his own writing, and it’s doing great in the ratings since it came out last week. So his agent tells him. “That’s really cool of you, though, thanks. You want a picture or something, uh—?”

“Oh, uh, it’s Megan! And that would be *awesome*, thank you so much.”

“I can take it, if you want. I got these long-ass gibbon arms, good for selfies. I’ll only steal your phone if it’s nice.” He makes space for her beside the wall of the fountain as she hands it over. “Oops, look, it’s a piece of shit! Lucky you, I’ll let you keep it.”

She’s laughing in the couple of photos he takes, and Richie hopes she won’t care how sweaty he is, or notice the massive, purpling hickey under his jaw. He’s handing the phone back when she looks down at the ground, and then up at his face, fidgeting with her long sleeves.

“It’s, um — it’s cool if Eddie wants to be in one, too.” She glances sideways, tucking some hair behind her ear.

Richie follows her gaze. Eddie has been so quiet, Richie hadn’t noticed him standing off to the side. He looks like he’s trying to fade back into the crowd, the world’s cutest secret agent. His heart does something ridiculously fond when he sees the soft, proud look Eddie has on his face, like Richie has done something amazing, like he looked when Richie shoved him out from the path of the spider’s claw aiming straight for his heart. Like Richie’s a lifesaver.

He clears his throat of sudden emotion, and glances down at Megan’s hopeful expression. Eddie’s eyes widen, and he stops fiddling with the bare popsicle stick when Richie calls, “Yo Eds, get over here.”

“Huh?”

“This is Megan, and she has great taste, ‘cause she wants you in the photo too.”

Megan covers her face, mumbling in a rush that, "It's okay, you don't have to, it's fine, I just—"

"Don't embarrass her, Richie," Eddie says quietly, sidling over.

"I wasn't, I was trying to embarrass you."

"Well, that makes a change," Eddie says, and Richie can't get a handle on the big, all encompassing thing that's filling him up, as he watches them make introductions.

For however proud Richie is of the special, he's lightyears prouder of its catalyst. His brave, loudmouth best friend, producing hand-wipes from somewhere to clean his sugar-sticky hand and apologizing profusely before he shakes Megan's. Richie wants to put him in every photo at his side, take him to every premiere, and say *look. Shut up and look. He's the one that made me want to admit to the world that I have feelings.*

He slings his arm around Eddie's shoulder as Megan stands between them, barely coming up to even Eddie's nose. She could be Eddie's relative, both of them with their liquid brown eyes like a calf's, though Eddie looks distinctly more nervous as he smiles, mouth closed tight. But he's there. And he's *trying*, and his shoulders aren't even tense under Richie's arm.

They stay loose, and relaxed in Richie's hold, waiting with uncharacteristic patience as Richie signs a waffle napkin for Megan and her girlfriend.

"Cammy," Megan supplies, her eyes shining as she says the name. Richie recognizes that look from his own face in the bathroom mirror, when they shave next to each other in the mornings. He refuses to let Eddie go, so he's basically shoving the Sharpie up Eddie's nose as he writes, and he can feel Eddie shaking as he tries not to laugh. "Her name's Cammy. She's going to be so jealous, thank you so much!"

They move away down a side street off the fountain plaza afterwards. As positive as fan interactions can be, Richie doesn't want to draw any more attention that will have them roasting around outside when

there are plenty of air-conditioned spaces they can flee to.

He keeps his arm around Eddie as they walk, feeling lighter than air.

"She was nice," Eddie says. He's got his hands jammed in his pockets. Richie's so filled up with contentment he wants to pick him up, swing him around in a circle. He'd do it too, if he wasn't sure his creaky old back would go out. There were perks to being a kid in agonizing love with his best friend, being able to manhandle him wherever Richie wanted, under the guise of roughhousing. Limbs clumsy and too violent with a strange desire.

"She's a Richie Tozier fan, of course she's nice. I'm like a honeypot."

"Doesn't that mean you only attract flies?"

"I think it means I'd be great in prostitution stings."

"That's a *honeypot*, Rich."

"Oh. I don't know what it means then, my brain is melting. Can't believe you finished that popsicle without me."

"It was my favorite kind. I'll get you another one."

The storefronts tower in a rainbow canyon around them, wandering aimlessly now. They're never going to find a good engagement present, so Richie's just luxuriating in the solid press of Eddie's body into his side. In the reality that nobody's giving them a second glance, un-tethered by judgemental staring. Thousands of miles and twenty-seven years since Derry had him feeling like a monster for looking too long at Eddie's pink mouth, his galaxy of freckles.

"She was nicer than the fucking paps, I mean," Eddie continues. His head is on a swivel as they slip past a sports store, their reflections warped around Nike logos in the window. Blurred so close together it's like they're one person. Eddie all stitched-up tight under his arm, while Richie sprawls, billowing shirt and wild hair and limbs too long to contain themselves. "I don't mind photos if it's for people like that, but... how'd she know my name?"

"She probably follows me on Instagram. And she's obviously seen the

special.”

Eddie stops dead. Inertia brings Richie’s hand sliding from his bony shoulder up to the sweaty nape of his neck, and he pushes his fingers happily through short hair.

“You talk about me in your special?”

Richie blinks, incredulity creeping in. Does Eddie actually think Richie is capable of *not* talking about him?

“Uh, yeah? You’d know that if you watched it.”

He does talk about Eddie. He’d run most of the show’s material through Eddie’s uncompromising filter first, pacing up and down the living room night after night until Eddie was red faced and guffawing into the collar of his own shirt, pulled up over his mouth.

But not all of it. He still likes to improv.

*So, my boyfriend and I...*

And hold for applause. For fucking *cheering*. The theater bellowed with approval, and Richie’s knuckles were white pearls under his skin as he grinned like a shark out at the audience, gripping the microphone hard. A kind of tightening, overwhelming emotion in the back of his jaw, like biting into a lemon. But sweet instead of sour. So, so sweet, remembering the other kids in school or the mall or the arcade muttering *faggot* as he fled them all with his eyes watering, and letting thirteen year old Richie take a look from behind his same thick glasses. *Look at us now, little guy.*

Eddie could never be his dirty little secret because Eddie has never been dirty, despite what his mom had him believe. Richie might be a Trashmouth, but as the people in the front rows whistled for him, the words *my boyfriend* felt almost sacred on his lips. His favourite part of the whole goddamn show.

Eddie’s sunglasses catch the searing sun as he frowns at Richie, pushed up into his hair. If he had them on, Richie wouldn’t be able to see the wary look in his eyes, or feel the way his heart stumbles at the sight.

“You — I’m not gonna watch it if you just make fun of me the whole time.”

His heart stumbles even further, taking a ten-storey leap down into his stomach. “Eddie, I don’t — I don’t make fun of you?”

“You *always* make fun of me,” Eddie says, his voice shaking a little. His body folds in, elbows jutting out in ramparts.

Richie lets his hand drop from Eddie’s shoulder, groaning up at the canopy of palm trees. Feathering green against blue that’s too blue to look at, summer light overexposing everything.

It’s too hot for this shit.

“Get over here, you little turd.” He yanks Eddie by the straps of his overalls, tugging him into a shaded alcove between two stores. Eddie’s nose wrinkles at the steaming garbage cans at the end of the alley, and a flash of begrudging affection ripples through the absolute frustration that’s building in Richie’s sinuses like a ferocious sneeze.

“Why do we always wind up having these convos in public, huh? I’m starting to think you’re a drama queen, Eds.”

A scowl slams down Eddie’s eyebrows so quick Richie’s kind of worried he’ll pull a muscle.

“What—?”

“No, fuck that, I know for a *fact* you’re a drama queen. How can you think that? I’m *so* fuckin’ proud of this show, how can you actually think I’d go up on stage and rip into you for an hour and a half? You know that’s only funny to one person, right? *Me*.”

His hands clench and unclench around the thick, boiling air. His head hurts, and he knows if he tells Eddie, he’ll be immediately supplied with multiple bottles of water, and the Tylenol he secrets on his person like a magician with cards up his sleeve. It only makes him hurt more, sore in the heart.

“I know you find it funny, that’s why—”



Richie flails his hands up in disbelief. “No talking! I’m talking right now!”

Eddie snarls, but Richie’s seen him *really* angry, and it feels like he’s still pulling his punches as he jabs his finger into Richie’s chest. “You’re always fucking talking!”

“So are you! I mock your shit in private because you’re the *only* one who ever gives as good as he gets. You know how fucking good that feels? I know you love it too, even your dirty talk is mean.”

Eddie flushes, looking quickly at the oblivious shoppers floating past their nook like multicolored fish in an aquarium. Richie storms on.

“And I do it ‘cause if I didn’t, you’d kick me outta the house for sounding like a Hallmark card. Hearts and roses, man, all damn day.”

Eddie’s deflating now, his hand softening on Richie’s chest into a loose grip in his collar. His color’s high, going higher still as he looks up to see the rabid look that’s twisting Richie’s face. He feels half mad, breathing like a bull with the need to get this through Eddie’s thick skull.

“That would be weird, I guess,” Eddie says, small-voiced.

“Right? I’d make you call an exorcist.”

“I’d just dunk you in the pool to cool you off.”

“And I appreciate that. So, do you get it? You huge *dumbass*? When I go on stage it all comes outta me. I don’t *make fun of you*, I have to talk about how much I fuckin’ love you or I’d explode!”

Suddenly cognizant that he’s close to shouting, he stops. Sags back against the wall opposite Eddie, rough stucco digging into the sweat-thinned fabric of his shirt. Phosphenes burst in the dark as he rubs his eyes hard, under his glasses.

“Oh.”

“I don’t wanna yell at you. Fuck.”

“Richie...”

Something in his stomach flutters open like nervous, fledgling wings, when he feels Eddie’s arms wrap around his middle. It’s hope, perhaps. Hope that he hasn’t just shoved his heart out of the nest only for it to plummet to the cold ground.

“Richie, I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, I think I get it.”

Richie swallows, regret flowering now that he’s calmed down. “No, I — I shoulda asked if I could talk about you.”

“I’ll watch the show, I promise.”

“Yeah, you’d better,” Richie mutters thickly, hugging him back like an octopus. He buries his nose in Eddie’s hair, pressed uncomfortably against the sunglasses. Inhales the mild citrus of his shampoo to block out the nearby garbage, the stench so strong in the heat it’s practically ripping his face open by the nostrils.

“I like it when you give me shit. I know you do it ‘cause you — ‘cause you like me,” Eddie mumbles into his neck. “That’s why I do it back. Been that way since grade school.”

Richie snuffles a laugh into his temple, glad of the meagre privacy the little corner affords them. “You hated me even calling you Eds, in grade school.”

Eddie squeezes him until Richie gasps. He’s got some firepower in those sinewy arms. Ping-pong is a real man’s sport, Richie will not be convinced otherwise.

“Yeah, but I liked it too. It’s *our* thing. It’s private. That’s why — for a second I thought, all these people who recognize me, they’d think I’m a joke, too.” Richie squeezes him back. Not too hard, he doesn’t wanna hug the idiocy out of him. “Don’t want strangers thinking they can laugh at me for — for private stuff. S’your job.”

“Nah, I don’t air the dirty laundry of the Tozier-Kaspbrak household on stage. Just the real impersonal shit. *I love him so much I can’t masturbate alone any more, I finally get love songs, I nearly crash the car when Phil Collins comes on the radio. I’m forty years old and I only just*

*discovered it's possible to get turned on at the sight of a grown man in overalls, et cetera."*

"Fuck off!" Eddie's giggling at him, stepping back. His face is a little blotchy, but it's probably because embracing in this heat is nigh-unbearable. "It's the Kaspbrak-Tozier household and you fuckin' know it."

"Tell that to my lawyer, dude, I got my name changed months ago."

"Ugh," Eddie sighs. "Now I gotta change mine, too."

The best thing, the grand golden prize of being with someone Richie has known since they were both picking boogers in the sand-pit, is the knowledge. The bone-deep certainty about shit. When Mike's call came and brought back all his memories, along with his lunch, shining bright among them like a diamond in a coal mine was the certainty. Absolute surety that he knew and loved his friends, and was known in return. That he was still in love with Eddie, had really been loving Eddie every time his head turned after the dark sloe eyes or the solemn face of a stranger in a bar. That he knew Eddie's ticks and his secret love of nature, and how crazy loud they can get together without it being too much for either of them. In return; Eddie knows Richie's head is too full to keep quiet, that he needs to cling like a vine, and a billion other things that he came to California in spite and because of.

And so Richie knows, as he drapes his arm over Eddie's shoulder once more, that however pissed they get with each other, it's *never* going to be for very long. There's just too much that they'll want to come back for.

"I really am sorry, okay? Can we start over? Somewhere else? We're never gonna find a good engagement gift here," Eddie says, close to sulking.

"I told you that before, but you wanted to come anyway."

"Well, we can't get them a Predator statue! We had one first."

Just before they rejoin the thronging crowd, Eddie stops at the mouth

of the alley. Richie's heart picks up to a steady clip as Eddie gives him a significant *look*, and deliberately moves Richie's hand from his shoulder to the back pocket of his overalls.

"Yikes, Eds," he says, a little strangled. Cups his hand around the firm curve of Eddie's be-denimed ass, a frisson of excitement washing through him as Eddie's face pinks up under his staring.

"Not a fuckin' word," Eddie mutters, glancing up at him, and away in an instant.

Richie wouldn't be able to tell anyone a single thing that happens as they amble back into the masses, not even with a gun to his head. His hands and his heart are full and his mind is empty, buzzing with syrupy static. Where they go doesn't matter when Eddie's shifting under his palm as they walk, and the tight grip he has around Richie's waist has him floating free.

He surfaces from his happy stupor when they detour into the neon assault of the cinema's arcade, at first for the blast of A/C to chill the sweat from their exposed skin. But the cheap clatter of tokens ignites something nostalgic in them, and they stay for a while. Long enough that Richie eventually takes his hand out of Eddie's pocket, though it feels like torture to do so — Eddie's shit-talking, and Richie is bound by the Loser code to whoop him at some fighting game. It isn't Street Fighter, but then, that one always carried the stain of frightened humiliation after Bowers.

It's so much better than Street Fighter. Dazzling, retro patches of color illuminating the fierce concentration on Eddie's face. He wins, his eyes a funfair whirl of light as he laughs, and Richie can look as long and as lovingly as he always wanted to back in 1989. As much as he wanted to even back in January, when they spent his Christmas tokens in Santa Monica, Richie sweating bullets every time Eddie jostled him at the machines.

"Did you see that shit?" Eddie gloats, tugging on Richie's shirt. "I still got it."

What a difference nine months makes. Nine months is a lifetime, when you're starting your life back over again the right way.

The Grove is emptying as the sun anchors itself lower into the skyline. After a much-needed juice break they wind up in the overpriced athletic store from earlier, Eddie kvetching about needing new socks, or something. Richie leaves him to it and wanders around, feeling like a gangly naturalist in a jungle full of ripped, coiffed, shiny creatures.

He's not morally opposed to sports. Some people just take it to a level of intensity Richie thinks should only be reserved for, like, brain surgery. Or going nuts in the pit at a concert. He shuffles past a lurid display of equipment that looks more like a bunch of sex toys, idly flicking through his phone.

He hates having to chug gallons of water just to get groceries, why would he want to deliberately sweat *more*? Exercise only really seems worthwhile when he gets an orgasm out of it, that's all. Not that he doesn't enjoy ping-pong, or floating around on his back in the pool until Eddie gets insistent that he's gonna have a sunburned dick. Maybe that's the link. He likes sports he can do in his own house, preferably with easy access to the suntanned planes of Eddie's skin when they get too bored and hot to continue.

There was a coach in middle school, Eddie has told him, who asked Mrs K if Eddie would consider joining the track team. It makes sense to Richie; he'd spent many a pointless, dusty gym class furtively contemplating the whipcord stretch of Eddie's thighs from the corner of his eye. Face flushed, arms shaky, and not just because of the rope climbs. Eddie could always keep up with him on their bikes, with Bill, with Bev, when he didn't have his mother's voice ringing in his ears. Mrs Kaspbrak said his asthma was too severe for track, though, so that was the end of that.

So Richie might not *get* sports, but he gets this. The intense, wistful look that locks up Eddie face when he's watching YouTube videos of gazelle-legged Europeans running marathons in the Alps. It's about proving something to a memory, or maybe to himself.

Richie is fully prepared to sit in some cold bleachers if he has to. It can't be that different from sitting through a comedy gig, right? He's good at sitting on his ass.

He rounds a corner past a mountainous basket of footballs, and spies Eddie at the end of the aisle. He's clutching two packets of tube socks, glaring at them like they're nuclear launch codes he has to decipher. Richie snorts and takes aim with his phone.

He zooms in on Eddie's deathly serious face, haloed in socks and underwear. Annotates the video, *eddie is starring in sophie's choice 2: this time it's hosiery*, and sends it out to his 'gram story for the people to enjoy. If he can't brag about having a boyfriend who's just as much of a weirdo as he is, then what the fuck is the point of social media?

He's sloping down between the clothing racks towards Eddie as inconspicuously as he can, when something bright catches his eye.

A fucking celebratory brass band revs up in his head. *Oh, this oughta be good*, he thinks, gleefully pulling it off the shelf.

"You struggling, babe? I never knew socks were so tricky."

Eddie doesn't reply right away, and Richie cranes his neck to see what's got him distracted. Two young guys at the far end of another aisle, shoulders so jacked Richie's surprised they can stay upright from being so top-heavy. They're holding hands.

He sticks his tongue in the side of his cheek, bites it to stop laughing. "You see something you like, Spaghetti Man?"

Eddie's sputtering attention snaps back around so fast it looks like he might get whiplash. Sometimes Richie's concerned that Eddie might not actually be a very good risk analyst.

"What? Fuck no, as if. They're probably young enough to be our kids."

And that's — a little depressing. A little sweet, too, that Eddie said it like that. *Ours*. Kids are freaky little boundary-free aliens in Richie's eyes, and people get annoyed when you make dick jokes around them. He can barely accept responsibility for himself, let alone something small enough to get pulled down a storm drain, but still.

"No?" he presses.

“No, Richie, ew. They’re just... I could’ve never held hands with you in public, at that age.”

Richie beams at him. “Well, color me glad we’re old fucks, then.”

“Yeah.” Eddie looks back down at his handful of socks, a small smile on his face. “I guess I’m doomed to only prefer guys that look like a scarecrow fucked an Ent.”

Richie spots himself in a mirror propped at the end of the aisle. 6’2”, miles of stubbornly pale, stilt legs keeping him half a head above Eddie. Keeping him too conspicuous not to crack jokes, in the hopes of distracting people from how self-conscious he is. Bright, tropical palm leaves on his sail of a shirt, and he only put it on that morning because it still smelled like Eddie, who kept it on during sex the day before. His hair is a black birds’ nest from the humidity, and he probably has a few more lines around his glasses-magnified eyes from how much he’s been smiling this past year. Who knew sheer happiness can sink its marks into the body, just as deep as depression?

His bone structure can still get it, though. Eddie’s not the only one Twitter writes him filth about. He pokes his tongue out at his reflection, just to make sure that it’s him. That this isn’t all a dream.

Eddie’s looking at him, fond.

“I always knew you wanted to climb this like a tree, Eds.”

“Maybe,” Eddie snorts. Then he catches sight of what’s in Richie’s hand, and he looks like he’s having a stroke. Face gone ashen in an avalanche, and his left eye twitching like a grasshopper.

“What the fuck is *that*,” he hisses.

“Oh, this?” Richie twirls the jockstrap around one finger in a gunslinger flourish. Eddie stares at it like it might actually be a loaded six-shooter. “It remind you of anything? You had shorts just like ‘em.”

It’s red with white trim, sturdy white loops for the legs and a little rainbow flag stamped proudly on the waistband. Very tidy. Like it

wouldn't dare to go to the bathroom without a hall pass. Very Eddie.

Sexy as shit, in Richie's opinion.

"I *never* wore something like that," Eddie says, eyebrows raised. His shocked-white face is turning almost the same color as the underwear.

"Sure you did! Red ones, real Village People. I used to jerk off every day you wore them. Eighth grade was a nightmare, I was like *ay, Dios mío*, there he goes again. I don't need this today, we have a test tomorrow."

"Jesus Christ, again with the shorts. My mom bought those for me, y'know."

Richie ignores him. "It goes with your whole deal, too." He waves the jockstrap up and down Eddie's body, the whole embarrassed length of him. Squeaky-clean sneakers to the neat wave of his cowlick. "Y'know, how you dress like a Boy Scout troop leader? But like, one from a porno."

Eddie looks down at his overalls, his Thundercats, eyebrows all scrunched and bewildered. He looks like he's under attack. "What does that even — I'm fucking *comfortable*, asshole!" he squawks. "Like I'm gonna take fashion advice from the guy who still dresses like Ace Ventura."

"Aw," Richie coos, holding the underwear to his heart. "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

It's nearing closing time and their corner of the store is empty. If it had been anything otherwise, Richie's sure Eddie would have stormed outside by now, probably after throwing store property at Richie's head. Instead he's just standing there, looking mildly constipated.

"C'mon, aren't these things good for running?" Richie pries. The cup part is soft cotton, and his mind stirs a little hotly at the thought of the red against Eddie's tan thighs, his beautiful cock filling it out. Then he frowns. "Wait, you *do* wear undies when you run, right? I



dunno how I feel about you flopping around all over the neighborhood.”

“Of course I wear *underwear*,” Eddie snaps. He’s eyeing the thing like it’ll bite, and suddenly snatches it from Richie’s hand, testing the give of the elastic. “This would be useless for running.”

“Aw man, really?” It looks like regular, normal briefs, just without the butt part. Or the legs. Still, it’s not like it’s lace, or anything.

He quashes *that* thought down as fast as he can. This place has security cameras.

“You’d look hot as fuck in it, though,” he says, honestly a little disappointed. It was a long shot, but he’d hoped this might go the same way as the weed argument, that he might convince Eddie it was beneficial to him, rather than reveal his own massive hardon for Eddie letting his hair down enough to try new things. It’s unbelievably heady, knowing Eddie even wants to, and trusts Richie enough to do so over and over again with everything from sexual acts to spicy food.

“You, uh. You really think—?” Eddie’s pink as a raspberry, chewing his lower lip. His eyes are narrowed to beady slits. “You’re not just fucking with me?”

Richie gives him a flat look. “Didn’t we *just* fight about this?” It’s like Eddie thinks Richie touches his ass all the time solely for the good of his own health. Sometimes he’s the dumbest smart person Richie knows. “I wouldn’t joke about this, it’s life and death. Yes, you’d look hot. Kinda impossible for you not to, have you seen—”

“So, you’d like it?”

“I — huh?”

“You’d be — you’d be into it?”

Forget raspberries, Eddie’s face has transitioned into full beet status. He clutches the jock close to his chest like he’s hiding it from the cameras, or the few bored staff still hanging around the register. Richie’s brain stalls. Loops like a broken CD player. Would he be *into*

it? He'd never leave their bed again, but that's not the point.

"Would — would you?" he asks, heart thumping.

"I mean, it's not... bad. And if you'd want—"

Eddie coughs.

Heavy, bassy trap music has been blaring from the store's loudspeakers ever since they wandered in, but now it sounds distant, as if muffled at the bottom of a swimming pool. All the air sucked from the room. Richie shuts his mouth, once he realizes it's hanging open. *What the fuck is happening?* He licks his lips, and Eddie's wary eyes drop from his to track the quick movement.

"I mean — yeah, Eds. But only if you — I'm not *asking* you to—"

Eddie seems to come to some conclusion, and tilts his chin up. And it's — oh, that well-worn set to his jaw, that fire in his eye that always spells some form of disaster for Richie, good or bad.

His insides evaporate.

Even the bad winds up being good in the end. It always felt like his number was up whenever Eddie clenched his teeth and decided *today* was the day he'd finally dunk Richie in the quarry. He didn't know that Richie fought so hard, not against being drowned, but against the nuclear blast of *want* exploding inside at having Eddie swarm all over him, loud and slippery and close.

"Go on then," Eddie says, low. He shoves the underwear at Richie, who catches it just so it won't fall, fumbling and mute. "Go buy it, mister big shot Netflix special."

Then he grins like quicksilver, probably at Richie's stunning impression of a goldfish. "I'll be outside," he says, and turns on his heel, the socks forgotten.

Richie stands there, swaying.

He likes to think he's good at predictions, at guessing where a joke can go that will land the most laughs. But he flubbed it when he

decided to go back to Derry, didn't anticipate the giant murderous clown, or seeing the love of his life again in a Chinese restaurant. He messed up every time he hogged the hammock, aiming for entwined legs and an argument, suffering instead a shaky yearning that felt too colossal for his body. And this, this offhand prank to make Eddie blush; to say it's gone off the fucking rails is an understatement. You don't wear something like this to go running.

He heads dumbly to the register, never more glad to see not a hint of recognition in the cashier's eyes. Or maybe she's just discreet. *This is why online shopping exists*, he thinks, gnawing the inside of his cheek as he hands over his card.

The sky is bronze and the air is still exhaust-fume hot when he leaves the store's air-conditioned refuge, sunset glinting off distant skyscraper windows like shoals of golden fish. He slips his hand into Eddie's waiting grip and they leave quietly, in the direction of the parking lot.

He catches Eddie glancing into the backseat more than once, his eyes drifting over his own shoulder and then up to Richie's nervous babbling. When the weight of his staring gets too much, Richie caves and plants his palm high on the inside of Eddie's leg, grainy denim under his fingers and fiery daring in his chest. It shouldn't feel daring. They've been touching each other for long, glorious months now, but his laugh is shrill to his own ears when Eddie murmurs, "Watch the road, Rich," low and rough after a couple of minutes.

Fucking *rich* coming from him, scourge of the Los Angeles streets.

"You're killin' me, Smalls," Richie replies, grinning out of the windshield like he's got fishhooks in the corners of his mouth.

Eddie's face strobes in the streetlights, eyes lidded in obsidian and fluorescent orange. "Idiot," he says softly, teeth dug into his lip.

His legs spread minutely wider under Richie's hand. The road rolls out before them, blocks ticking past like the excited beat of Richie's heart in a countdown towards something, Richie doesn't know what. But he's not sure if he'll survive it, when the alarm finally sounds.

## Notes for the Chapter:

me crashing into discord like the fucking kool-aid man: EDDIE IN A JOCKSTRAP???

the hardest part of this fic for me, Jock Since Birth, to write was richie not caring about sports. my heart, it is broken. i'll always have eddie. the part about the track coach is canon in the book, eddie really was good at running.

also iirc there's a scene where Richie begrudgingly lets Eddie have a lick of his popsicle and has a small Moment about it. The fodder is there, folks!

[@skinks](#) for continuous mental breakdowns over James Ransone's bootyass

## 11. Chapter 11

### Notes for the Chapter:

!! please note this chapter is a DIRECT continuation of the events of chapter 10 !!

Eddie's on him the moment Richie shuts the front door.

Tongue in his mouth already, and only one shoe off. Richie laughs into the kiss, feels Eddie return it when Richie pulls him closer by the pockets of his overalls, their hips lining up deliciously.

"Hey," Eddie whispers. Richie has to slump down a little against the door to kiss him when they're standing up. All the more reason to get horizontal, fast.

"Hey, yourself." Something red-hot is awakening down low in his stomach, something uncoiling in ravenous loops.

Eddie's fingers scrape into his hair, angling his mouth where Eddie wants it. Richie goes along, his body and spirit both willing. "You good?"

"Am *I* good? Might wanna turn that one around, buddy."

The hallway is dark, but he's so used to memorizing every angle of Eddie's face that he can still make out the glint of his smile. Richie wraps his arms around Eddie's waist, shivers when he feels hot hands range up under the back of his shirt. Eddie drags himself up like he's gonna start kissing again, but he only brushes past Richie's mouth in a tease and noses his way along to Richie's ear, biting his jaw as he goes, setting off sparks.

"I'm good. I'm kinda thirsty," he mutters, almost apologetically. Then he gently takes Richie's earlobe in his teeth.

Richie slides further down the door, moaning weakly at Eddie mouthing the skin behind his ear. Thank fuck he's forty and not eighteen, or he'd already be coming by now. Whoever decided stamina was a good tradeoff for short refractory periods was a

fucking genius.

“Well, let’s—” Eddie sucks on his earlobe again and his knees go to jelly. “Eds, *fuck*, c’mon — let’s get you some fuckin’ refreshment. Ándale.”

They disentangle, and Richie smacks Eddie’s ass towards the kitchen, tripping over himself and snorting back laughter when Eddie salutes him the bird over his shoulder. Just like in those photos of him running away from the paps, except Richie can do something about it that *nobody* else can. Because Eddie is *his*, just as deeply as he is Eddie’s, has been Eddie’s for most of his life in one way other another.

He’s convinced that’s why he could never make previous relationships work, his soul was still splintered into the warped old wood of the Kissing Bridge. Richie trots along behind him like a dog with its tongue hanging out.

The A/C is still mostly useless, the kitchen air heavy with the lingering coconut scent of the Thai curry they made yesterday. It hangs around them, weighted like garlands of strong flowers, makes the small space between their bodies stretch ripe like fruit about to burst. Eddie pours them both big glasses of water, and downs his own in one long, sinuous gulp. Richie watches his throat bob, watches Eddie watch him over the rim of his glass. His heart has been beating hard since they drove home from the mall, but now it pinballs wildly around the inside of his body, from his jugular right down to his groin. He can feel his pulse in his *cock*, for God’s sakes.

Eddie gasps when he finishes his drink, comes up for air wiping the spare trickle of water from his damp lower lip with his wrist. They’re so close, crowded together against the counter that Richie feels his exhalation brush his arm. He hasn’t touched his own water, because it would probably dribble right back out of his open mouth, already scratched up from kissing.

Eyes locked, the moment spins out like spider-silk.

The light fixtures hum in the silence, and Eddie slants him the biggest shit-eating grin Richie’s ever seen.

“*Fuck*,” Richie breathes.

They bought a tacky little cactus magnet the time they went to the Joshua Tree National Park, and it comes rattling loudly to the floor with all the others when Richie slams Eddie up against the refrigerator. He grabs hold of whatever he can, going wild with it, Eddie’s thigh hoisted up around his hip. Then it’s both legs, and they’re kissing ferociously as Eddie works whatever freaky core strength he has into keeping himself up, Richie muscling his thighs open with his hands full of Eddie’s ass.

“*Fuck*,” he says again, blurting it against Eddie’s jaw, hot and salty like popcorn. “*Fuck*, fuck, you’re so fuckin’ sexy, Jesus *Christ*—”

“Shut up, I’m not — *fuck*, Richie—”

Eddie’s hand flies from its death-grip on Richie’s shoulder to push through his hair. It whips Richie’s glasses off in the process but he doesn’t *care* when he hears them hit the floor, he can feel Eddie getting hard against his stomach as they push against each other and the fridge until there’s no air between them. His scalp stings right down to his ankles, and Eddie yanks him into another bruising kiss.

“You *are*,” Richie insists, grinning, eyes closed. He doesn’t need to be able to see to lick Eddie’s lips open, to dig his fingers into the tight meat of his thighs. Eddie’s deceptively heavy, and he’s biting at Richie’s mouth like he’s starving. “You drive me fuckin’ crazy—”

“You too,” Eddie says, his voice gravelly. Probably because Richie’s attacking his throat. A sharp groan bursts out of him when Richie sets his feet wider and jounces him a little higher, his legs tightening around Richie’s waist. “I want you all the fuckin’ time — I think — Rich, *ah*, I t-think we should have sex.”

The weight of him gets too much. Richie isn’t exactly stacked in the muscle department, so he lets Eddie slide slowly down his front, both hissing when their erections drag together. They lose themselves in exploring each other’s mouths a little longer, awkwardly rutting like animals, before Eddie’s words finally register through the heat-haze stewing Richie’s brain.

“You — whad’you say?” He digs down the back of Eddie’s overalls, down his briefs, squeezing handfuls.

Eddie’s distending fistfuls of Richie’s shirt, gulping down air. One denim strap is dangling over his shoulder, pulling his shirt collar low enough that Richie can see the beginnings of the sizeable bruise he left on the side of his neck. He looks fucking debauched already and all their clothes are still on. Not for long, Richie hopes, if he heard right.

“C’mon, you said, I didn’t hear—”

“I said, we should have sex,” Eddie repeats, shaky but determined. His eyes blink open into dark, clouded pools in the low kitchen light.

Richie stares at him. All the blood in his body is redirecting to his dick, maybe that’s why Eddie isn’t making any sense to him. “Uh... yeah, I kinda figured that’s where this was headed? But I shouldn’t assume, Eds, you’re right.” He smirks, taking Eddie’s face in his hands and shoving his thigh back between his legs so Eddie’s mouth will gasp open for another kiss. “Consent is *paramount* in this house, y’know. I think we should have sex too. Right now, a ton of it. Together, I should’ve mentioned that part—”

“No, dumbass,” Eddie laughs, squirming away from where Richie’s fingers are scrabbling at his ribs. There’s nowhere for him to go. Richie’s not afraid to throw his height around if it keeps Eddie pinned to the fridge. “I mean, we should — we should fuck. Not here, we eat in here.”

“Pretty sure that table would say we’ve fucked in here before, man.”

“Not like — not like this. I want to, uh. I mean, I think we should...” Eddie sighs gustily, tipping his head back against the fridge to glare at the ceiling. As Richie palms softly at his bunching jawline, confusion building through arousal, it seems like Eddie’s speaking to himself. “Come on, Eds.”

“Uh...”

“Ugh, catch up already. I want...” Eddie says, pulling Richie down by



the collar until their foreheads kiss together, hot and grimy with sweat. He whispers, like Richie's the only one who can ever know what he's gonna say next. "I want you, to *fuck me*."

And—

Oh, fuck.

"And he arrives," Eddie jokes, unsteadily. "Glad you could join me."

Blood roars through every whorl of Richie's ears like a waterfall. Their hair is disgusting with the day's limp heat, all threading together as he stares into Eddie's huge, nervous eyes, not even an inch away. Neither of them blink.

"I can do that," he chokes out. "I — holy shit, okay. Yep. No problemo. You got it, babe."

Eddie huffs a small, burnt up laugh. "No problemo?"

"Shut up, fucknuts, I'm — Eds, stop laughing at me."

It isn't fair to laugh at him right now, he's having a heart attack. He kisses Eddie quiet, tongues meeting gentler now even though Richie can't ever remember being more turned on in his entire life. Not even when they've had sex in the past, not even the time Eddie ditched shaving for a few days and gave him rugburn inside his thighs so intense he walked around bow-legged all weekend.

"Just so we're clear," he gasps, arousal stabbing a sword in his gut as Eddie's hands roam up under his shirt, thumbs circling his nipples. "You mean, like, a dick in ass situation—"

"Yes, oh my God." Eddie tries pulling away again, stopped by Richie's mouth latching back onto his. He mumbles, "You just wanna hear me say it," between their lips.

"Maybe. I'm a real easy man to please, I don't ask for much."

"You're definitely easy. Such a perv."

"Only for a fine thing like you, darlin'," Richie drawls.

Eddie clears his throat, holding him at arm's length. By the look of his flared nostrils he's trying to calm his breathing, and Richie cracks up at Eddie's put-upon expression, so ineffectively stern with his eyes blown black and his cock a visibly thick line under his clothes.

"Richard, please put your nasty dick inside me." He punches Richie's shaking shoulder. "There, you giant shit, are you happy?"

Richie is so happy he might pass out, his body smouldering hot enough that he's surprised his clothes haven't disintegrated. He cackles into Eddie's neck, groping at him just because he wants to get closer. Eddie's laughing too as he finally wriggles out of Richie's grasp, patting his cheek.

"Okay, I'm gonna — gonna take a shower, I'm all gross."

Richie leans his burning face on the fridge in Eddie's absence. It doesn't really help much, he might have to climb right on in. He listens to Eddie scampering down the hall, and focuses on taking long, measured breaths to stop giggling.

Oliver the Dalmatian is baying mournfully down the street. The noise carries far in the quiet night, sounds like the mile-high roof of heat above the city's got him kicking up a fuss just for the lack of anything better to do. *Hang in there, pal*, Richie thinks, groaning softly. He'd howl at the moon too, if it would cool him down even one degree. Not much luck of that happening, now.

"Holy shit."

He's chugging his water to see if he can steady his hands, adjusting himself uncomfortably in his shorts when he hears Eddie holler, "You can come too, dumbass!" from the other side of the house.

The water nearly shoots out of his nose. Seriously, this fucking guy.

*I wanna marry him.*

The thought comes fully formed and patient, like his brain has just been waiting for him to catch up.

*I want him to marry me.*

Richie leans heavily against the counter, setting his glass down with a bang. His stomach soars. It feels like he's swallowed a bomb, and his insides have gone up in a mushroom cloud.

It's like discovering a new color. Fucking terrifying.

"Ah, Christ. Good timing, Trashmouth." He thumps his forehead a few times with the heel of his hand. "Let's try fucking him first, huh, see how that goes." He picks up his thankfully intact glasses from their sad abandonment on the floor, and hurries towards the sound of the shower running.

Eddie must be finished with whatever he needed to do, because Richie finds him braced up against the black shower tiles on one forearm while the other moves steadily out of sight. Water streams down his back between his shifting, rangy muscles in glinting lines, silvery gold holding his shape together. The skin between his thighs looks pink and shiny-clean, dusted with downy hair flattened to wet swirls.

Richie's cock springs up against his stomach as he tugs his underwear off, meeting Eddie's lidded eyes as he watches.

"What took you so long?" Eddie says, turning back to the wall as Richie bundles up behind him. The water's beautifully fresh, soothing what feels like a fatal fever under his skin.

Eddie doesn't need to know about his most recent of internal revelations. Not right now. Not until Richie's bought a ring, at least.

"Had to pop a few boner pills, my bad," Richie replies, trailing open-mouthed kisses down the back of Eddie's neck, blushing and hot under his tongue. His stomach jolts as Eddie arches his hips back against him.

"Asshole," Eddie snorts. He reaches back to where Richie's rubbing his cock in the shower-slick cleft of his ass. His fingers are tight and quick around him, thumbing the head to make Richie's knees nearly buckle, feet slipping in water.

He snatches hold of Eddie's hips to keep himself from falling. "*Fuck,*

okay, are we — in here? Or—?”

“No, not yet, can you,” Eddie gulps. “Can you—?”

Richie looks down between them at the smooth planes of his back, the sweet, shallow curve of his spine. Eddie loves to talk about good posture, always prodding at Richie’s slumped shoulders. He’s putting it to good use, shifting his legs a little wider and holding himself open with one hand on his ass. The fire in Richie’s belly flares dangerously high, stoked by Eddie’s other hand teasing up the whole length of his cock.

He drapes himself over Eddie’s back, cards his hair into wet spikes as he kisses his temple. Slips his other hand down to toy with the delicate muscle at the very core of him, bright-hot and waiting.

“You want... right here?” He holds his breath, and presses one gentle finger to the tight furl. Eddie’s freckled shoulders look like the speckled skin of an apple, under the shiny film of water.

“Mmmh,” Eddie mumbles. His face is flushed in the steaming air, and Richie lays a kiss on his cheekbone, the creased corner of his tightly shut eye. “Yeah, please. Please, Rich.”

So Richie sinks to his knees. The shower tray is hard and uncomfortable on his joints, but in a distant kind of way, like the inevitable pain of a good massage. Fuck his knees, it’s the only place Eddie will let Richie do this, let him really go to town. Even then, it took a lot of convincing the first time.

He buries his face into it and laps him open, tasting water and the musk of clean, private skin. His pulse beats hard between his legs, skips and practically flatlines when Eddie reaches back to clench a fist in his wet hair, pulling Richie’s tongue deeper inside him. He eats him into the wall. Pushes Eddie flat against it, hearing nothing but the spray of the water and Eddie’s loud, helpless whimpering.

“God — the hell are you so — good at this — *ah*, you’re so — *fuck—*”

Richie wrings a high pitched “*Christ*” from him when he scrubs his bristly jaw all the way up to his tailbone. He’s so fucking responsive

to this, the unlikeliest of all the things Richie does to him, and it never fails to get Richie going. Eddie could sit on his face and Richie would thank him.

“Enthusiasm is key, babe,” he says, muffled, but Eddie probably can’t hear him. Richie holds his ass wider and sucks hard, tonguing around the first knuckle of his thumb to work him loose. Water pours into his eyes. He comes up for air, biting the soft skin of Eddie’s thigh, just above his tan line. “Your ass is really easy to eat out.”

Eddie lets out a startled laugh. He goes easily, when Richie hikes up his thigh to nose in at the dark skin behind his balls. “I — thank you?”

“Mhm,” Richie says, feeling lightheaded and powerful as hell, as he licks a broad line from Eddie’s taint right up to the pink buttonhole of his opening. Does it again, ‘til Eddie’s gasping and his hands slap clumsily to the tile. It’s addictive, the headrush that sends blood in a hurricane from his brain to his cock.

He’d stay there for hours if he could. Cupping Eddie’s most sensitive parts, licking him sloppy and open, over and over. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, baby, until his fingers go pruny and he ideally grows gills, but Eddie seems to have plans with a capital P. If their sex life has taught Richie anything, it’s that Eddie has all the best ideas and he’s just ecstatic to join in. He always did get a little hot under the collar at Eddie bossing him around.

But he still has Eddie clenching silky-tight around his tongue, when Richie moans into the last few, slick passes.

“*Shit*,” Eddie hisses. He turns the shower off, and Richie’s ears ring in the dripping silence, sitting back on his haunches to palm up and down the backs of Eddie’s trembling thighs. His heart thumps in long, drunken waves as he pants to catch his breath.

“I can’t walk right,” Eddie mumbles. He staggers out past the glass doors of the shower to grab a towel after nuzzling his face into Richie’s hair, his cock standing rigid.

Richie snorts and watches him go, pushing himself unsteadily to his

feet. Trust Eddie to perfect walking around like it's the world's fault he's got a boner. His knees and his jaw ache, and he grins like an idiot to make the hurt worse. It's worth it, to be able to feel every bit of this tomorrow.

"You're welcome," he calls out into the bedroom. He's met with a wavering, nonverbal noise of acknowledgement that only makes him grin wider.

He takes some time to brush his teeth and gargle mouthwash, because he learned the hard way that Eddie won't kiss him again otherwise. The mirror reflects an absolute disaster; eyes bleary with steam and the lack of glasses, his curls slicked back in a wet mess. Chest dappled in blotchy splashes of color, and his erection so swollen he's kind of afraid to touch it, in case he comes right there. He tries imitating Eddie's hawkish glare at it, willing it to chill out, but unsurprisingly only makes it worse. He's just wired that way, now. Plus, fucking the hottest guy in the world open on his tongue will have that effect.

He gives himself a couple of smug fingerguns instead, and rummages for the box of condoms that mysteriously appeared in the cabinet a few weeks ago.

When he's finished towelling his hair into wild clumps, he slips back into the bedroom to find Eddie standing in front of the mirror. The neat, tanned lines of him glistening with sweat, hands on his hips, with his thumbs hooked into the waistband of the jockstrap.

Richie's momentarily quietened libido slams back into his guts like a wrecking ball.

"Fucking — *yowza*."

Eddie's chewing at his bottom lip again, and catches Richie's eye in the mirror. "I wanted to see how it looked. That's why you bought it, right?"

"I bought it because you told me to," Richie says, dropping the towel in a heap and tossing the condom onto the bed. He prowls around Eddie, taking in the contrast between the medical-white of the straps

against the dark golden glow of his lower back. It frames his whole deal, his unfairly pert ass and his hardness all packaged up like a gift.

Richie wants to tear it open with his *teeth*.

“I’ll say it again. Yowza.” He’s proud of how steady his voice is, since his heart is thundering in his throat. Eddie blushes even deeper. The elastic is already leaving faint marks in his hips when Richie hooks one finger in to pull it slowly back.

“You’re killing it with the sex talk tonight. No problemo. Yowza. It’s like living with Yogi Bear.” Eddie folds his arms, his eyes looking a little less nervous in the mirror when Richie starts worrying his teeth in the junction between his neck and shoulders.

“Eds, I’m so hard right now you should be impressed I can stand, let alone talk.” It’s like being hypnotized. He watches himself in the mirror palm slowly down Eddie’s flat stomach to take a grip of his cock, rubbing firmly through the cotton, encouraging Eddie to buck forward into his hand. “What’cha thinkin’?”

“It looks... looks kinda gay, I guess,” Eddie hisses, tipping his head back. His hair is a drying fluffy mess against Richie’s shoulder, tickling his neck.

Richie snorts and grabs him rough around the waist. “Fuck, oh no. Not that. And all this time I thought you were straight.”

“Didn’t say *I* look gay, did I?” He snickers when Richie tenses up against him for a second. “I’m kidding, obviously. It’s actually, uh. It — *fuck*, Richie—”

Richie doesn’t register the nails biting into his arm, too distracted by dipping his fingers back between Eddie’s ass, finding him still soft and dripping from Richie’s tongue.

“Oh *God*,” he moans, closing his eyes tight. He snaps the elastic loudly against Eddie’s hip, making him yelp. If he doesn’t bring some levity into this situation he’s gonna bend Eddie over right here against the mirror, and he has an inkling that might stress Eddie out.

As it is, Eddie’s sagging against him and turning in his arms. “I take it

you're on board with this whole... thing."

Richie can only nod jerkily against his forehead. So on board. Reality's crashing over his head like a glass bottle; the white straps curved under Eddie's ass point like an arrow towards what he wants Richie to do. He's wet so Richie can fuck him.

He wants to get inside him and never leave.

"God," he says again, feeling pathetic with want.

Eddie's fingers trail blazing, swirling patterns down his spine, around to his stomach, cheekily dodging where Richie's twitching and unbearably hard.

"It's uh." Eddie purses his mouth, and gives Richie an amused squint that's somehow bordering on reproachful. "It's kinda turning me on."

"Oh, yeah?" Richie laughs. Isn't that something people say, that laughing during sex is a good thing? Eddie's a ridiculous person, he always has been. One set of rules for him and another for everyone else, and fuck you for embarrassing him when it's pointed out. He can't even follow his own advice most of the time, and it's funnier than any joke Richie can think of. "That's great, Eds, it definitely helps if you're horny."

Eddie shrugs, a sheepish tilt to his shoulders. He's really pitching a tent in the thing, and the sight of him curiously rubbing the wet spot has Richie's mouth watering. "Makes me feel, uh..."

"Like a stud? Sexy as shit?"

Eddie's all flushed and scowly, the way he gets when Richie's paying him compliments quicker than he can deflect them away. "I was gonna say *secured*."

Typical. What a dweeb. Richie beams at him. "Bet you're glad I suggested it."

"Yeah. Your fault, as always," Eddie says, and it feels like he's getting worked up again. Richie's pulse ramps into overdrive as Eddie loops his arms around his neck, like Richie's a tree he wants to climb.



“You’re pretty fuckin’ smart. Don’t tell anyone I said that.”

A shudder rips through him. Shocks his hands back to grasping handfuls of Eddie’s ass, on display for him, easy access. “Wow, that, uh. That really does it for me. Even more than you calling me an idiot, who knew.”

“Good. ‘Cus I mean it,” Eddie rasps. His eyes are eclipsed to a thin ring of brown around his pupils as he speaks, mumbling between kissing Richie dizzy. “You’re smart. Your non-dick jokes are great. You always work out the tip in your head before I do, it’s really hot.” The underwear’s soft against his thigh and it’s driving Richie insane, rubbing against the grain of his leg hair. “You treat me so good, half the time I don’t know how to fuckin’ act.”

Richie really is going nuts, head over heels. It’s heartbreaking that Eddie thinks he should be treated anything otherwise. His voice shakes as bad as his hands, clenched into the small of Eddie’s back.

“Who are you, and what have you done with my precious Spaghedward? Y’cant miss him, he’s like *this* tall, always looks like someone pissed in his cornflakes—”

“Right here, dipshit,” Eddie smirks into his shoulder, crooked and scarred and lovely.

“Phew,” Richie sighs. “Had me worried for a sec.”

Then he grabs the back of the jock and tows Eddie along by the waistband, dodging curses and futile attempts to land his heels hard into Richie’s shins. Back in Derry, for those first horrifying thirty-six hours, it seemed to Richie like adulthood had managed to beat the fight out of Eddie the way it had beaten Richie. He’s just grateful that now he can take any opportunity to beat it right back into him. Lovingly, of course.

He bounces when Richie throws him onto the mattress, scrambling further up against the pillows to make room between his knees. Eddie makes the bed every morning for some arcane, Kaspbrakian reason Richie isn’t privy to, even though they always have to strip the whole lot off again to get any sleep in the furnace of the night. Richie

shoves the covers down with his feet, eyes locked on the way Eddie's face is turning pink and challenging as Richie crawls between his legs.

He mouths at Eddie's cock through the fabric on his way up his body, adding saliva to the dark spread of precome already soaking through. Grips Eddie's thighs open by the straps, panting into his crotch as Eddie hisses, "*Fuck, fuck, oh—*" into a pillow, devolving into filth Richie can't even hear.

Eddie's swallowing repeatedly when Richie settles on top of him, feeling fall-down drunk. His brain spins in his skull so bad he can't focus his eyes or his grip, taking in every part of Eddie he can reach until it's returned in kind, hips jerking forward when Eddie's hands streak down his spine to grab at his ass.

"We really doin' this, Spaghetti Head?" he gasps, tongue curling around the bolt of Eddie's jaw.

"Sure fuckin' hope so," Eddie grinds out. He sounds like he's about to march into battle, which isn't the *most* encouraging. "I shoulda worn one of these sooner."

"Hey," Richie says, affronted. "Don't act like I wouldn't wanna fuck you even if you were wearing a hazmat suit."

Eddie looks thoughtful. Richie kisses him again hard, just in case he gets any ideas about how nice and hygienic it would be to fuck in a hazmat suit.

He has to focus on the little details, like how his thumb fits in the seashell hollow behind Eddie's ear, or the sheen of perspiration in his collarbones. If he doesn't, he'll think about how Eddie's lazily thrusting their erections together, and he'll get come all over an expensive pair of new underwear.

Every time he tries to pull away to fetch the lube, Eddie ends up reeling him right back in to make out a little longer, has them tangling up the sheet and knocking pillows to the floor. By the time he's fumbling the cap open they're both gasping for it, Eddie's arms knotted into a pretzel over his red face as his chest heaves in rhythm

with the fan overhead.

Thank fuck he shoved his towel under Eddie's hips, because he's making an almighty mess. He burrows his slick hand down between them easy, they know this part intimately. Slips one finger into the tight heat of Eddie's body and then two more, after a while. He loses himself for long minutes in the rolling, fucking arch of his hand, nipping at the peaks of Eddie's ribs as he imagines sinking inside.

Eddie's leg jiggles on the bedspread, a familiar nervous motion. It's only because Richie's concentrating so hard on being thorough that it takes a while to hear anything over the blood rushing in his ears. To hear the faint whistling in Eddie's chest.

"What—?"

He looks up. Eddie's rigor-mortis tense, his windpipe jerking visibly in his throat like a broken accordion.

"Oh no, oh shit."

They do this all the time. He's fingered Eddie raw more times than he can really count, so it shouldn't—

He eases out as gently as he can, but Eddie still winces, the whistling getting worse. His hands are shaking, one of them gripped around his other wrist as he covers his eyes.

Panic jumps down Richie's throat, as Eddie's breathing goes the really bad kind of ragged through his clenched teeth. It's like swallowing razor wire and having it pulled out the other end, leaving him torn through and awful.

"Oh shit, oh shit, Eds? What's up, are you — d'you need your inhaler, I can—"

"No," Eddie chokes out. He grabs suddenly at where Richie's hunched over him, frozen sick. Pulls Richie back down against him with his hands clasped shakily around the back of his neck. "No, I can do it — just, I'm fine—"

"No you're *not*," Richie whispers, terror rising. He moves as slowly as

he can to wipe his hand on the towel, his stomach churning unhappily as Eddie wheezes into the small space between them. He doesn't know what to — why *now*, why all of a sudden?

“Just — need a minute—”

“Is it — Eddie, please let me help, did I do something wrong, or...?”

Eddie shakes his head, pulling Richie closer. His forehead is all clammed up slick with sweat, and Richie wipes at it desperately. “Not you, I just — thinking, too much—”

And it clicks. At least, Richie thinks he gets it. This is a whole different ball game for Eddie, giving in to this one particular act that he wants. Richie would never devalue all the other fantastic things they do together, but even he gets the significance of Eddie *asking* to be fucked. It's a lot more than a prostate exam in a doctor's office.

Dimly he realizes he's rubbing firm circles into Eddie's shuddering chest, trying to soothe the monster in his lungs. It isn't *real*, Eddie knows that, they both do.

But some things are real. Bullies in Derry and all over the world who seed real stigma, real flashing danger signs in Eddie's head about what they're doing, safe and soft in their bed. Bullshit that has no business here. Fucking gazebos.

It comes to him suddenly. Eddie just needs to be reminded he's alright, to remember what he wants and what he's capable of, the only one of them who knew how to make the horror small, to remember — a wave of memory pulls Richie down in a riptide, down into a maggot-yellow kitchen rancid with the stink of fear, and Eddie's soft, freckled cheeks in his hands the last thing he might ever feel. The last thing he might ever do before the clown got them, and all he wanted to do was make Eddie feel safe.

His cheeks are rougher, leaner in Richie's hands now, but his eyes are still wide and lost as they find Richie's again. *It isn't real*, he thinks. *They can't get us any more, not for this. This isn't nineteen eighty fucking nine, and I won't let them.*

“Eddie baby, sweetheart, look at me. Look at me.”

Hot, creaking gasps against his face. Eddie clings to him, all arms and legs like a lemur, big nocturnal eyes boring into his like searchlights.

“Richie, I’m — I’m—”

“You’re okay. Look at me, and breathe, alright? S’just me.” He breathes in through his nose, sliding one hand up Eddie’s chest and down again on the exhale. “Just me, baby. Where are we, huh?”

Eddie’s throat spasms around the next breath. The fan ticks, endless useless oscillation, their constant friend all through the summer heat.

“Bedroom.”

“Yep. Our bedroom.”

Breathes out.

“Our house,” Eddie whispers.

“Yeah, that’s it.”

He doesn’t know what he’s doing, he never does, but it feels like it’s working. The breathing’s helping them both. Or maybe it’s only helping Eddie, and Richie’s wellbeing has always been unhealthily wrapped around Eddie’s like a creeping vine that needs another plant to grow.

“And you’re here with me, right?”

“Yeah, Rich.” The hands strangling the nape of his neck are releasing in increments.

“Think about, uh...” He casts his mind around like a frantic fishing line. Eddie once brought home a stack of papers from his therapist, months ago. Richie leafed through them one morning while he waited for his coffee to brew. All full of stuff about focusing on the exact present moment, to block out bad memories and shit — it’s better than nothing.

“Think about right now, okay? I’ve got you. We’re both sweaty as fuck. Um, it’s like, just after eight. Here, check this out,” he says, kissing the corner of Eddie’s mouth, softening the grim line of it into a small, twitching smile.

“You feel that shit? You’re right here, man.”

“Yeah, I — I feel it,” Eddie says. His voice is hoarse, but it’s lost the sickening wheeze. In the lamplight his eyes look black, and Richie can almost see himself in them.

“Right here,” Richie murmurs again. He’s managed to quell the frightened cymbal crash in his own head, too, which is a relief. Eddie’s chest slows to a lullaby under his palm. “I love you, Eds, I’ve got you.”

“Yeah,” Eddie whispers.

He strokes the backs of his knuckles against Eddie’s jaw, willing it to unclench. It does, after a few minutes, and a huge tenderness unleashes sails in Richie’s belly at the sight, blowing him skywards. *He’s so fuckin’ brave.*

“There you go. Knew you had it in ya.” He settles down on his side against Eddie, still holding his face. The minutes tick by peacefully, punctuated by Eddie kneading his fingers into Richie’s arm like a cat, where it’s slung across his quietened body.

Richie’s idly contemplating the patterns of his arm hair against the sparse wisps on Eddie’s chest, when he’s roused by Eddie clearing his throat.

“Fuck,” comes the pronouncement. The royal Kaspbrak decree.

If you don’t laugh, you cry, right? Especially when it’s funny, and Eddie’s way with words never ceases to amaze.

“That sums it up, yeah,” Richie snorts, poking Eddie in the ribs to try and make him slap-happy. It works, too.

“I dunno what — I was fine, I was uh, into it, obviously, and then I just...” Eddie trails off. He reaches down under his waistband to rub

at himself. Absently, by the looks of how he's gazing up at the ceiling in thought. Against all odds he's still somehow bulging demurely at the seams of the jock.

*Unbelievable*, Richie thinks. *He's the one who has a panic attack and I get the boner scared offa me.*

Eddie sounds entirely irked with himself when he speaks again. "It's so *stupid*. I wanted it. I still want it, but I kept hearing all the shit people always say, or what — what *It* said. About guys like us. About me."

Richie kisses the knob of his shoulder. "I get it, dude. Just 'cause we're old pros at blowjobs now doesn't mean it's all gonna be easy." Eddie looks at him, mouth twisting into such a grateful expression that Richie's stomach hurts. "Derry did a number on all of us, and it probably would've even if we *didn't* have good old Pennyfuck popping outta every shitter, calling us fags and trying to bite our faces off for liking each other. I get it."

"Yeah. I guess you would," Eddie says. He stops touching himself and scratches his nose, still *looking*, looking, always looking.

It's the only kind of self-preservation Richie's ever had, the years of pretending Eddie looked so much simply because Richie was funny, or annoying. The alternative was too much strain on the places puberty already had his body stretched translucent, unfathomable on a cosmic scale, like trying to wrap his brain around the concept of infinity. A goddamn sewer-pipe dream, almost as painful as the idea that it was all just wishful thinking.

"But you can beat this shit better than anyone," Richie says. *Concentrate on the moment, for fuck's sake.* "That's a *fact*, don't even try arguing with me. We never would've known how to kill It without you, man. You're a fuckin' hero."

Eddie whacks him in the chest, but leaves his hand there. Presses fingertips to the soft part of Richie's jaw, where his heartbeat lives. "I guess."

"I *know*. Plus, when you threw that post? Shish kebabled that

motherfucker? Oh man. So hot. Like, creamed my jeans hot.” He grins at Eddie’s dumb little smile, his exasperated eyeroll.

“You were unconscious, you never saw that. Snoozing on the fuckin’ job.”

“Yeah, but like. I still know.”

Eddie coughs up an ugly snort of a laugh, and then he’s turning to plaster himself all over Richie’s chest, squirmy and warmer than the heat-struck dark itself.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbles into Richie’s ear. “Thank you. I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to ruin it.”

“Eds, you don’t — you got nothing to be *sorry* for, Jesus.” Richie loves him, *God*, does he love him. That doesn’t change the fact that he’s a moron. His heart knocks hard into his ribs as he wraps Eddie tight in his arms, smiling ruefully into the sweaty flop of his hair. “We should’ve talked it out first, if anyone should feel shitty it’s me. What do you wanna — I can still suck you off, but we don’t have to —”

“See!” Eddie groans. Richie lets out a small *oof* as Eddie plants his hands hard on his chest to peer into his face with a strange, bewildered outrage. “It’s shit like that, it just makes me wanna fuck you more! Not everything is about me, Richie.”

“Huh?”

“What about what you want? You’re so... you’re so fuckin’ *good*, it’s crazy. I wanna do things for you, too.” As if for emphasis, he digs his knees sturdily into the mattress and grinds long and hard up Richie’s thigh, until the bulge in his jockstrap is snug against Richie’s re-awakening cock. The circulating air hits the slick trail he leaves behind and sets Richie shivering violently, his stomach lurching.

“Uh, I don’t...”

Ask any comedian, sit any of ‘em down for ten minutes and they’ll reveal what kind of sad, desperate people-pleasers they are. Richie’s no different; it’s borne from figuring out around the third grade that



his lack of looks, athletic talent, or common sense left him with ingratiating himself to the other kids with jokes. It's simply inconvenient that he also happens to have a loud, disgusting sense of humor that doesn't do him many favors outside of a stage. So maybe he likes to go overboard in trying to please his partners during sex, it isn't a crime. He'd trade the money and fame in a heartbeat if it meant he got to make Eddie happy for the rest of his life.

It all means, in the end, that he doesn't really know how to ask for what he wants. Especially since all he wants right now is to fuck Eddie senseless, and look how well *that* went.

His head spins like a carousel, all colored lights flashing behind his eyes when Eddie licks his palm and starts stroking him in a loose curl. The kiss comes slinking between them just as Eddie's wrist angles into a twist, and it's suddenly huge, the hunger, roaring back to life through Richie's bloodstream.

"Okay?" Eddie says. He's flushed across his cheekbones, down the sides of his throat. He looks like he's waiting for something, so Richie nods, quickly. Whatever will keep Eddie from losing it again, keep him touching Richie like that, slow and measured. "Lemme just — just take care — okay. Stay there."

He shifts and in a moment he's laying down between Richie's legs, cheeks hollowing around the head of his cock, just like he did with the popsicle mere hours ago.

It'll never stop feeling like falling.

His insides liquify, sinking like lava between his legs.

"Holy — holy *fuck*, Eddie, oh God, God—"

He thickens back up in the scorching wetness of Eddie's mouth, under his enthusiastic swallows. Richie pants out all the filth he can think of to describe how it makes him feel, to see Eddie's naturally worried eyebrows tick up like he's enjoying every second. He can't think, can't do anything but grip the sheets in his fists and look away when Eddie grins up at him and sucks sloppy, like he's really just trying to get Richie wet. Saliva pooling around his knuckles, dripping hot onto

Richie's stomach.

He can feel — his cock slides into the smooth channel of Eddie's tongue and it feels strung to the very back of his spine somehow, his tailbone, his asshole clenching on nothing. Eddie's still staring up. He rests his head on Richie's thigh, lipping gently at his scrotum until he catches his breath and goes back for more. At one point he pries Richie's hand away from the bed and holds it to his scarred cheek, makes him feel the shape of himself pressing through from the inside of Eddie's mouth.

It's like there's a metal rod planted in his gut, Richie's so hard. "Jesus, Eds, babe *c'mon*, I'm gonna—"

"Don't come yet," Eddie says sternly, which proves what an unfair little *shit* he is, because he follows it up by suckling tight, devoted kisses into the tip. His eyes would have Richie pinned in place even if Eddie *didn't* have both arms looped under his thighs.

"Easy for you to — fuck!"

Richie's gonna burn a hole right into the bed, like that old Elvis song. Eddie holds his cock against the flat of his tongue and *licks*, so fucking slowly it feels like it won't ever end, like Richie's going to expire in a mess over Eddie's face and it'll be all his own fault, because Eddie didn't know the first thing about sucking dick before he came to California.

Eddie pulls off him at last, dragging his bruised mouth up through the bubble of precome beading at Richie's slit. One of his legs jerks against his will when Eddie flicks his tongue and the most embarrassing whine builds in Richie's chest, but he's too full of pulsing heat to keep it down.

"Fuck..."

"Hell yeah," Eddie says, and his voice is *ruined*.

It feels like he's been on edge for hours. The need builds into an aching coil in his hips, snapping them up instinctive when Eddie settles his bare ass right against his groin.

But, still—

He bites down on a moan, pressing his hand to his forehead. *Get it together, or you'll both fuck up again.*

“Eds.”

“What?”

He follows Richie's mouth as he struggles to sit up against the headboard, and they're kissing again for long, breathless minutes, hands everywhere, rubbing Richie's chest 'til he's cursing, spreading open Eddie's ass to feel where he's still slick and loosened.

“Fuck, Eds, wait.” Richie pulls away again. “Are you sure you still wanna — you really freaked me out for a second, there. Don't do this just 'cause you think I want to.”

“I'm — I still wanna,” Eddie gasps, rocking forward to smear wet kisses down Richie's jaw in a shivery line. “I'm not the fuckin' martyr here.” He's reaching for the condom, the one Richie completely forgot about.

And, well. Why is he even arguing? It's probably better like this anyway, Eddie has more control if he's straddling Richie imperiously like his hips are a throne. He's got that look in his eye again, stubborn as a mule. Richie swallows, breathing hard.

“Okie-dokie. Round two?”

Eddie huffs a little laugh, eyes creasing. “Okie-dokie. You fuckin' loser.”

“*Your* fuckin' loser.”

“Fuck yeah, you are.”

The foil crinkles in Eddie's shaking hands, the sound cutting tinny and sharp through their soft murmurs, the muffled rasp of their bodies sliding together. Embarrassingly, it sends a jolt right down to Richie's cock, another pulse of precome making even more of a mess of Eddie's hole. He pulls a strap aside and pushes two fingers back in,

their wrists knocking as Eddie clumsily rolls the condom down while pressing into Richie's cupped hand and reaching for the lube, all at once, eager and flushed.

"God, okay," Eddie hisses. Richie tries hooking his fingers and Eddie's pinched face collapses open with pleasure. "Okay, okay, okay, tell me what — Rich, tell me—"

"I'm gonna, hold your fucking horses."

"I did some — some research, but—"

"*Research?*" Richie cackles helplessly into Eddie's chest. "Did you Google how to fuck? You're gonna be on some kinda watchlist, man."

"Shut up! Just, c'mon, since you're such an expert." Eddie's all gritted teeth, turning pinker every time Richie angles his wrist up, gets Eddie riding his perineum against the heel of his hand. He's thumbing at Richie's jawline, light, sweaty touches that dart away when Richie tries to catch them in his mouth. Why should Eddie be the only one who gets to suck on something?

"Not an expert, but even if I was it's different every time. You might not even like it, that's cool too—"

"I *know*, but I — I still wanna try." Eddie still looks so serious. Richie kisses his pout away, 'cause sex is supposed to be *fun*, not a research project. "Do *you* not like it? What's the hold up?"

"Alright, alright. Let's boldly go, Captain Eds." He pulls Eddie up onto his knees by the back of the jockstrap, grinning at his reluctant little moan. Talk it through, he can do this. "Tell me to stop *whenever*, and I will. Just, concentrate on relaxing your abs, okay? I know that's hard for you, mister six-pack."

"Asshole," Eddie laughs. Richie's cockhead snags against his rim for a second and they both make the same, pleading noise. "I don't have a — *ahh*—"

He sinks down, opening up around where Richie's easing inside.

"Ah — *ah*, *Christ*—"

“Yeah, just — just like takin’ fingers, just — don’t *clench*—”

“It’s a lot bigger than *fingers*, Rich.” Eddie pauses, holding stock still. He’s staring unseeing at the wall behind Richie’s head, like he’s doing long division. Hands braced on Richie’s shoulders.

It’s a tight fit. Richie pets at Eddie’s stomach, his whole body feeling swollen with the need to come, immediately. This might be over humiliatingly quick, he wasn’t prepared for the sight of Eddie Kaspbrak, his choirboy haircut pulled loose and looking pornographic, staining a jockstrap dark red from taking Richie’s dick. The head of his cock is in, Richie knows from experience that it only gets easier. Especially since it’s just the right depth to press at that *spot*, the one that has Eddie’s hips jerking against him.

“*Oh*, shit, that’s—”

“That’s it, yeah — you’re, *fuck*, you’re doing better than I did. My first time *sucked*.”

“What?!” Eddie says, and apparently shock helps him stop thinking so hard, because he relaxes and sits the rest of the way down, flush to Richie’s balls.

“Jesus Christ,” Richie says, faintly.

He gets his legs bent and plants his feet, hauling Eddie further into his lap as he leans back against the headboard.

He’s so hot inside. Quivering and hotter than the sun, than the whole unbearable summer rolled into one taut, grumpy, beloved package. Eddie’s tight quads flex around Richie’s hips as he sits there, adjusting. He wriggles, and Richie wraps his arms around his waist, waiting with his face pressed into the sweating hollow of Eddie’s throat, overwhelmed.

“You,” Eddie gulps, after a minute. “You’ve done this b-before?”

“Ye-es,” Richie replies, drawing the syllable out with a long lick to the hard branch of his collarbone.

Eddie sounds intensely interested. He’s stroking Richie’s arms

steadily, like a metronome. “Huh. I always thought you’d — I mean, you’re taller than most guys.”

“That’s — that’s not how it *works*, oh my God,” Richie says, feeling unhinged. His hips are begging him to push up, in, deeper, it’s agonizing. “The American education system claims another sex ed victim. So sad.”

Eddie’s laugh lines are out in full devastating force, thank God, though his eye twitches every time he shifts his weight. “‘Scuse me for ever doubting you. I guess I never thought anything else could fit in there besides your own head.”

“I forgive you.” Richie coaxes him down into a heated kiss, gripped in the jaws and shaken by obscene, animal thoughts of how he’s filling Eddie up from both ends. “How’s it feel, Eds? Not being a giant virgin any more, I mean.”

“Oh, fuck you,” Eddie laughs, cutting himself off quick when the motion jostles him too hard in Richie’s lap. “Ah — mmh. Fuck.”

It’ll be hard to get any closer to Eddie than this, but he wants to die trying. It feels like he’s spent his whole life trying to get closer to Eddie. At least, the parts of his life that matter, the ones with Eddie in it. Once upon a time he had a hayfevered nose pressed into his back and two arms around his waist, one wedged crooked inside a graffitied cast, as he pedalled his bike as carefully as possible down the concrete desert of a Derry road. He treasured those rides for months afterwards, dreaming up ways to get even closer without resorting to breaking Eddie’s other arm. And then came the hammock, ruining Richie’s whole life as he knew it.

His heart hammers at the memory threading into the present, feels it echoed in Eddie’s hard adult chest pressed against his.

“That’s so not fair, though,” Eddie pouts. His eyes are hazy-bright, like the sun through mist, and he rolls his hips forward gently like he’s testing it out. “Holy — holy *shit*. Uh, fuck, I mean. That’s not — you’ve done this before *and* someone else got to fuck you first? That’s bullshit.”

Always so goddamn competitive. Richie grins, presses a kiss to the underside of Eddie's slack jaw to take his mind off the slick, rippling heat around his cock. "You can still fuck me anytime, baby."

Eddie starts rocking in earnest, curling his hips forward into a shaky rhythm. He moans breathily when Richie fumbles the jock's waistband down, wanting to see the head peek out. His cock is a hard ridge against the pouchy give of Richie's stomach, and Richie has never, ever, experienced anything hotter than this. He's gonna come so hard he dehydrates, or shoots into space, leaving a crater behind.

Eddie pants into his mouth, his eyes screwed shut. He must be getting something out of it, ragged noises pressed behind Richie's tonsils every time his cock nudges thick against something inside.

"Eds," he breathes. He doesn't know where to put his hands next, his heels sliding on the sheets. Thrusts up just to see what happens, reeling when it knocks loose a harsh breath against his ear. *I did that*. He goes again, and it feels like being licked all up his back, scratched between the shoulder blades. "Eds, you fuckin' believe this?"

He gets a deep, strangled noise in response. He takes it as a *yes, Richie, do tell?*

"I'm fucking you," he says, giddy. Eddie's hands wrangle their way back to their favorite spot, pulling Richie's hair out by the roots, jamming shocky arousal down his spine. He grabs Eddie's ass where he's sprawled close in his lap, squeezing until it must surely hurt. He wants to — to stuff Eddie up 'til he's screaming, make him forget all the bullshit in his prickly brain. "I'm *inside* you, man."

"Yeah, I *know that*," Eddie whines. He barely sounds like him any more, high and scraped raw, but the annoyed incredulity at himself for having the audacity to enjoy something is a hundred percent authentic Eds. "Oh *God*, you sure are, fuckin' — you're really — really up in there, champ."

Richie laughs, ducking his head to lick the blush cascading down Eddie's sternum, salty-sweet. The impact jarrs his shoulder when Eddie's forehead thumps forward against it, his hips grinding in shallow circles like he's just using Richie's cock to take what he

wants, and it's *amazing*.

He can't do much, pinned under Eddie's weight and his hot hands pressing him back against the headboard, but there's no place he'd rather be. Richie wraps one long arm around Eddie's straining ribs to haul him down even harder. Flattens his hand above the cheery rainbow label to the golden plane of Eddie's stomach, wishing he was hung like Eddie, so he could feel himself moving inside.

Pressure throbs down low in the pit of his stomach. Slick, suggestive noises rise between them like bubbles as Eddie lifts and sinks down him slowly, and Richie might hyperventilate if it gets any warmer.

Eddie winds his arms around Richie's shoulders, clumsy and sucking wet at his pulse. It's so fucking good, Richie doesn't even care that he's stopped riding him delirious, and is just holding Richie deep inside him as they kiss. It's blissfully good.

*This is the life*, Richie thinks, wildly, gasping small as Eddie's internal muscles squeeze around him. His imagination runs hot at the thought of asking Eddie to keep his cock warm while he's just watching TV or something, and he stifles a laugh at the response he might get. A kick in the shins, probably. Maybe Eddie would let Richie do it for him, with his mouth, or—

Eddie bites at his chin, makes a gurgling noise when Richie scrapes gentle fingers down his back.

"You okay?" Richie whispers.

"Yeah." Eddie's making all kinds of weird faces, eyes clamped shut. "It kinda hurts, but, not like — it's good. I broke my arm before — I got stabbed in the fucking *face*, I think I can handle your dick."

He's hard as a rock when Richie reaches down to rub him through damp cotton, slipping his hand inside to jerk him lightly. Eddie's good at pain, he should have known. Richie's a giant wuss about it, refusing all his dad's attempts to fit him a set of braces. But Eddie's the one who rode in a clattering bike basket with a freshly broken arm without fainting. He's the one who always dug curious, indignant fingers into the bruises he got chasing Richie up trees.



Maybe he was trying to prove to himself that he wasn't a fragile, porcelain doll of a boy, or maybe he just liked to be reminded he'd had a good day at the Barrens when he went back home to his cloying prison. Who knows. It's still baffling to Richie, that Eddie goes out voluntarily to run until his legs are wobbly and in need of icing. Richie complains when he gets a hangnail.

He gently kisses the pale fang of Eddie's scar. "You're so fuckin' hot."

Eddie sniffs, shifts a little to lean back against Richie's bent knees, dragging his insides against Richie's erection so good he has to bite him hard on the jaw for it. "So are you. I wanted this for so — and it's so good — it's really—"

"You like it, Eds?" he slurs, feeling sly. "Huh, baby?"

"Yes, you smug prick, I fucking like it, I love — I love you, Richie, fuck—"

Richie's heart rockets straight up into his mouth.

He makes a noise so strained, so messy from somewhere deep down inside that he shocks himself. Eddie — of course Eddie does, Richie knows that, but he loves every part of Eddie right back. From his jagged hipbones to his seesaw, Manhattan-stained voice, his speech always so rapid like he thinks no one will listen to him if he doesn't spit everything out in a rush. He loves every single part, so he likes to tell Eddie any chance he gets. And if he's saying it back, then Eddie must feel the same way about him.

It's just, Richie's never heard him say it before.

No one's ever said it to him before. His parents, yeah, which he should really stop taking for granted when he knows what Eddie and Bev went through, but they're dead and this is *different*.

No one's ever said it to Richie before in earnest, meant it like this, which really does something to you as a person if you spend forty years that way. It rots open a small crevice inside, where it's safe to retreat and cry and acknowledge there must be something about you that no one can want.

That's the place the noise comes from. Gut-punched and painfully happy. His eyes sting, and he doesn't give a single shit.

Eddie's gone again, his face hot in Richie's neck as he screws himself, but Richie can see the grooves of his dimples spreading like ripples in water. He's smiling wide like he can't really believe what he's done, but he's thrilled to have done it, humming hot and pleased when Richie croaks like a frog and yanks him down by the hips. It's unbearable, how Richie can't feel or see or hear anything other than Eddie, his love, who actually loves him back.

His vision swims.

"I can't — Eds, you little—"

"I love you so much, Rich," Eddie gasps. He blinks open one space-dark eye, and he's grinning from ear to blushing ear.

"Don't make me cry when we're *fucking*, asshole!"

He heaves Eddie up and they're toppling ass over elbow in a flurry of Richie's too-long, uncoordinated limbs and Eddie's muffled swearing. His forehead bashes into Eddie's shoulder. The room spins. Eddie starts laughing hard underneath him as Richie violently blows a strand of hair away from his face, but his chucks dry up into broken little hiccups when Richie lifts his hips up and fucks right back in between his thighs.

"*Hnn — fuck—*"

"Say it again," he demands.

"I love — I love you, ya big crybaby."

He has to lean down and wail out loud into Eddie's shoulder, or the massive cresting *thing* in his chest will consume him. Eddie's still tight and hot, still laughing at him, so he snaps his hips forward and blows a raspberry into his sweaty neck to shut him up, but all it achieves is Eddie writhing down onto his cock, pink-faced and giggly. Richie groans, and slumps into the cradle of his hips in defeat. He's on fucking fire, his heart beating blood hard into every extremity as he gets his elbows underneath him, somehow gets a pillow under

Eddie's ass with minimal fuss to start fucking him into next week.

So many of Richie's edgier comedy contemporaries have mellowed after finding long-term, stable relationships, that it almost seems like an inevitability. It always felt like corny horseshit to Richie, the way the crass jokes borne from sexually frustrated cynicism crumbled apart into earnest insistence that *no, really, I've never been happier*.

Well fuck him, they weren't kidding. It really is the best sex he's ever had, and he tries to focus so he can remember it later, but it's way too fucking good. Eddie's bony ankles locked around the small of his back, urging Richie forward and rolling his own hips up to meet it, as they bite ragged kisses into each other's lips. The sound of Eddie panting harsh in his ear on every stroke, his head thrown back into his sweat-black hair spread all over the sheets, the blunt scrape of his nails on Richie's scalp, down his arms, Richie's heart jackhammering in his chest as he chases after Eddie's orgasm, his own barely given a second thought. It's loud, and startling, when Eddie slams his hand back to the rocking headboard to stop Richie's thrusts shoving him any further up the bed, and Richie covers himself by burying his burning face in the musky hollow of Eddie's armpit, licking the dark hair flat until Eddie spills wet onto their bellies with a shocked grunt.

"*Fuck*," Eddie whimpers, his jaw working as he stares down at himself in disbelief. Richie's steady rocking wrings a couple more ropes of come onto his tensing stomach, making a mess of his jockstrap, and Richie reaches down mindlessly to stroke him through it. "Fuck, fuck, oh my God, *Richie, fuck—*"

"Fuckin' hell, Eds," Richie gasps. Eddie's clawing up at his arms like he's drowning, and he's clenching around Richie's cock so tight he doesn't think he could pull out even if he wanted to.

He opens his mouth for Eddie in a daze, when he's yanked back down for a hard kiss, Eddie's soft inner thighs still vibrating against his ribs.

"Keep going, keep—"

"Okay, shit, okay — are you—?"

"Stop asking me that and fuckin' *move*," Eddie snaps, and he looks so

blissed out that Richie does what he's told, kissing him as dirty as he knows how.

"God I — fucking *love you*—"

"Love you too," Eddie pants, gripping white-knuckled at his own hair for once, as Richie manoeuvres him where he wants him. "Gimme it, c'mon—"

"You can't just *say* shit like that," Richie whines, pushing himself up on unsteady arms. "Eds, no fair."

A bead of sweat drips from his chin to the corner of Eddie's mouth. His tongue flicks to lap it up, and one of Richie's elbows buckles along with his lungs, a moan ripping out.

"Fuckin' stop me, then." Eddie looks so goddamn pleased with himself, slapping Richie heartily on the shoulder, wearing the same sharp grin he gets when he wins at ping-pong for the sixth time in a row. "C'mon, Trashmouth, let's go."

His head is spinning, sweat clouding his eyes as he gets his knees under him to really put his whole body into it, feeling Eddie's hair run through his fingers and the crooks of Eddie's knees slip damp where they're hung over Richie's arms. He feels fucking crazy with love and endorphins, choking the words out against Eddie's teeth, held there when Eddie hooks his elbow round the back of his neck with a desperate, overstimulated whine. Blood pounding low in his gut. His hamstrings and his lower back scream at him, and it's worth it. Everything below his waist feels molten and he keeps *slipping*, his legs almost numb with how good it is, and then he feels the barest touch of Eddie's fingers at the base of his cock where they're joined and he's coming on a sob, filling the condom deep in the clutch of Eddie's body.

He collapses. Drags air into his lungs with some effort, lost in the hot waves rolling through him that pull his hips into a final few shaky jolts. Holy shit. Holy shit, holy shit. If it's like this every time, Richie won't even make it to Halloween.

"Holy shit."

Eddie's wheezing under him, but it's not the bad kind. It's just because Richie's sprawled on top of him in a limp, spent mass. "Jesus."

"Eds, fuck."

"I know." He feels Eddie cup the back of his skull, so gently. Eddie's in love with him. He bucks into him again by mistake, high as a kite on the knowledge. "Ow, Richie."

"Sorry," Richie says weakly, struggling to his elbows. Eddie's legs have wrapped themselves around his hips again, and he looks as messy as Richie feels as he slowly opens his unfocused, blown-out eyes. He brushes a kiss to Richie's mouth, one that turns into dozens, like first soft snow.

Richie has to move away though, missing the heavy scarf of Eddie's arms as soon as he does. "I'm gonna — I'm pulling out, okay?"

They both hiss as he slips free, Richie falling back to sit down heavily between Eddie's thighs.

The extractor fan rattles quietly in the bathroom.

Eddie looks... wrecked. Usually he's insisting on cleaning up by now, but instead he's just splayed like a starfish dead on a beach, all curled up around the edges with heat in a puddle of his own come. Strands of hair stuck to his forehead like dark swipes of ink. The white straps are a flashing neon sign, drawing Richie's eyes naturally to where his ass is already flowering a deep, bruised pink from Richie's hips. His cock is piled out sticky over the waistband of the irreparably stained jock, and Richie gives it a few gentle pats to make sure he's still alive.

"Fuck off," Eddie mumbles, nudging Richie with his foot. "I'm fucking dying."

"You're not dying. Even my dick game isn't that good."

Eddie's throat bobs, like he's trying to work more moisture back into his mouth. His eyes are slits full of shrewd humor when he lifts his head to peer down the length of his body. "It's pretty good."

Richie snorts, leaning over to kiss one of his knees, buckled open like a clamshell. "You're fulla surprises today."

"Don't go spreading it around."

"You wound me, Eds. Gimme some credit."

Richie ties the condom off and slides his hand up Eddie's shin, thinking while they wait for their breathing to calm.

"Maybe it's a good thing you forgot the socks. Those things *and* this?" He snaps the elastic into the crease between asscheek and thigh, enjoying how Eddie twitches. "I'd blow my load before I even touched ya."

Eddie sighs, letting his head fall back to the mattress with a soft *whump*. "You have some kind of perverted jock fetish, don't you?"

"Nah, just a you fetish. I missed out on ripping those socks offa you in high school, that's all."

He gets kicked again for his troubles, but Eddie's cheeks are dimpling. "I'm gonna take all your fuckin' lunch money, nerd," he mutters, when Richie sinks back into his arms to kiss him silly.

"God, I wish you would."

He'd happily stay there for the rest of the night, it's so goddamn hot that the sweat doesn't even dry off and make them chilly. Just lingers there like prickly heat, like riding unsteadily home wearing tightened skin at the end of a long day spent tussling in the woozy, beetle-rank grass with the boy you wish it was harder to love, but he makes it the easiest thing in your life. So easy you don't even have to think, and that's what's so dangerous about it. He is, and you love him for it, and the only way to stop is for him not to be him, the unthinkable.

It *was* dangerous, that's not a false memory. And this is dangerous too, the butter-soft press of Eddie's tongue against his. Not for the old kind of fear, that their neighbors might kill them for loving, but for the way Richie knows this is it. He's a goner, and has been since day one. But this time the difference is knowing that Eddie's a goner too, and that Richie will do anything to keep him from regretting it.

“Okay,” Eddie sighs at last, pinching the bridge of his nose. Hopefully he’s too well-fucked to notice Richie left the condom lying on the sheets next to them. “Fuck you Richie, that was good. Is it always that good?”

Richie nuzzles in delightedly to smudge a kiss under his jaw, against the berry-purple bruise he started earlier. “I cannot *wait* to find out.”

Eddie hums. He’s rubbing tiny circles into Richie’s scarred palm with his thumb, and Richie gazes at him feeling hollowed out, all his love poured into Eddie’s being.

“How we feeling this fine *noche*, Eduardo?”

“Uh, great. Kinda sore, thanks to you. I’m fucking starving actually,” Eddie replies, and his stomach gurgles loudly, as if to prove his point.

Richie makes a production of checking his bare wrist. “Looke here, I think it’s pizza time.”

“Fuck yeah. I knew I loved you for a reason.”

Richie can’t help it, he has to draw him giddily back in for another hug, crushing him close until Eddie’s squeaking like a dog toy, banging fists into his back.

“I won’t say it again unless you order some food, I mean it! We haven’t eaten since that popsicle.”

“Speak for yourself, I had me a juicy fuckin’ meal right here,” Richie grins, pulling away to stand up, smacking Eddie hard on the ass as he goes.

Eddie groans, curling up in a come-soaked heap like a tadpole dumped cruelly on dry land. He glares balefully up at Richie, betrayed. “Why the fuck would you do that.”

“Oh dude, my bad. Ah simply cannot refrain, Edward mah deah!” Richie cries, heading to dispose of the condom. “Lawd knows, you ah just too damn—”

“Yo, Rich.”

He turns, and the soiled jockstrap hits him square in the face, catapulted across the room.

“No Voices in bed!” Eddie whoops, between breathless peals of laughter at Richie’s expression. “I fuckin’ told you, man!”

He doesn’t stop laughing, not even when Richie hurls a pillow at him as hard as he can.

It’s with good intentions that he tries to take pity on Eddie and bring him the pizza in bed, but Eddie only grumbles about getting crumbs in the sheets and insists on hobbling first to the shower, and then to the kitchen. It makes no sense to Richie, since the bed is a mess anyway, but it was dumb to expect anything else. Eddie may be limping, but a little pain in his ass will never stop him from being a bigger pain in Richie’s.

“I think the delivery guy recognized me,” Richie says, watching Eddie shift gingerly on the couch. “I gave him a giant tip. Feelin’ very generous tonight, y’know.”

“I could tell,” Eddie says. “Is mine—?”

“Gluten-free, yes. How many times have I ordered us pizza by now?”

“More than is good for us, probably.”

Eddie’s looking at him with a smile tucked into the corners of his mouth, so un-stuck and exhausted as he sits there drenched in one of Richie’s loose black band tees. So soft, like a dream, and Richie wants to take a picture of him in the hopes of preserving how he feels right now, but he won’t. If he’s lucky he might get to keep feeling this way for a very long time, and then there’s no need for pictures. He sits down instead, where Eddie’s patting the couch next to him impatiently.

Oliver is still howling sadly at the oven-hot darkness outside. The sun has the moon in cahoots, Richie thinks, no relief from its reflection



even at nighttime. The noise drifts faintly over the buzz of the fridge, the contented beat of Richie's heart, as they sit there eating in silence.

One of Eddie's bare feet has snuck over to rest atop Richie's by the time he pipes up again.

"Richie, you — you know I've, uh. I've always felt that way about you. You know that, right?"

Oh God, they're talking about it. Eddie really has a knack for making him feel vulnerable. Like a bug, splattered on the windshield of his own emotions.

It's one thing to suspect it. It's one thing to hope, to be thirteen with thrilling fear pounding the back of his skull like a hammer on an anvil every time they all rode past the Kissing Bridge, wondering if Eddie ever saw the letters and wondered too. But it's another thing entirely to hear it.

Richie clears his throat, stalling. It's the jalapeños' fault that his face is burning, of course. "I... I mean, I kinda guessed."

"It's just, you looked so surprised." Eddie's hand comes to curl softly into his hair, not pulling. Just stroking his ear, 'til Richie gets the shivery feeling he might cry again. It's fine, he'll blame that on the peppers too. He's such a fucking mess. "I'm sorry I couldn't say it before."

"It's okay, I know you're... I know."

"Yeah. You always fuckin' *get it*, and that's why I'm sorry. Just 'cause I'm messed up, it doesn't mean you don't need to hear it."

"Eds, you show me all the time. You think I don't know what it means when you still kiss me after I suck your dick?"

"Oh, how fucking romantic," Eddie snorts. "Look at me swooning over here."

His throat is a battleground of hickeys, unmistakable against the black of Richie's shirt collar. It's loose on him, the frayed neck

stretched out from years of use, long years spent without someone willing to listen to Richie's stupid opinions or stupider dreams of directing a movie one day. Without someone who brings him home novelty sunglasses from trips to the drugstore, or who shows him funny animal videos on YouTube. Someone who worked himself into a nursing frenzy the week Richie caught the flu, but still kissed his sweating forehead through the dumb paper facemask. Of course he knew how Eddie felt.

Richie swallows, tasting mozzarella and a sweet, settled calmness in the back of his mouth. Like cool milk, soothing the burn of capsaicin and uncertainty. "I'm not a total idiot. Sometimes I'm surprised your head stays on with all those screws loose, though."

Eddie pinches his ear. "Sometimes I'm surprised you can hear anything with your head shoved so far up your ass."

He grins, and Eddie grins right back. Richie ducks in to kiss at a dimple, because he doesn't think he'll ever get tired of the visual confirmation that Eddie is happy. Plus, he's cute as fuck.

"Man, I'm just honored I get to be the one to screw 'em all back in."

"Uh huh."

"Get it, Eds? *Screw* them—"

"I get it, I get it." Eddie hides his smile behind a slice of pizza. "You think you're so funny."

"Yeah, but so do you." He sits back, poking Eddie low in the belly. He was *inside* there, earlier. The thought makes him flush hot and tingly all over, reminds him of what they were talking about. "So, uh. You mind telling me when you first...?"

Eddie munches thoughtfully for a moment. "Do you... do you remember when you brought me flowers?"

"Oh man, I don't, but I love this game. Puh-lease continue."

This is something that never gets old. When they Skype with the others it turns into a riot, all of them shouting at once as the

memories from Derry come flooding back, voices tumbling over one another like pebbles caught in a rapid. Over time, the good ones started outweighing the bad. With Eddie it's like digging for gold and hitting the jackpot every fucking time. For every little piece of treasured memory Richie coughs up, nervous even now about revealing how bad he really had it, there's always a shining flipside to the coin, Eddie's version of events. More often than not, they line up.

"It was right after I broke my arm."

Richie remembers *that*, clear as that bright Maine day. The sun mocked them then, too, streaming down like a happy families sitcom set, even as Richie's whole world was warping into a horror movie. They nearly *died*, Bill punched him in the fucking face, Ben's guts were hanging out and Eddie was taken away from them all.

Richie stormed home in a terrified rage, tears mixing with the blood from his nose into a metallic cocktail that turned his stomach. He remembers waiting anxiously by the phone for Eddie's call that never came, ignoring his mom's worried questions and dabbing cloth. And then—

"It was a bunch of weeds," Eddie laughs. "You brought me weeds. You brought my bike back, too."

The thing is, that Richie has never been good at knowing how to act properly. There are things people do in real life, and there are the things people do in the movies, and Richie always felt like the latter were far better for chucks. Why walk when he could saunter, why speak in his own voice when he had a dozen better Voices tucked inside his throat? Why talk when he could yell, grab at people, snatch and kick and love in a way that felt like far too much for his suffocating little town. If he made himself bigger, and brighter, then people's eyes would slide right past the swelling thing he kept hidden behind his back, shameful and sore like a zit.

That said, he knew in a distant way that people brought flowers to invalids, or to kids locked away with a broken arm. And he knew, even then, that Eddie liked things to be done *properly*, he and Stan were both losers that way. He liked it when the rules played out fair.

If things were played fair he didn't wind up yelling at Richie for cheating, freckles lost in an angry flush and screeching about how there was no such thing as a *gun* when you played rock paper scissors, Richie, you bastard.

Eddie was hurt, and more than anything else Richie wanted to make sense of *something* that terrible day, wanted to make it feel even the tiniest bit more normal. He wanted to do something the right way for once, for Eddie's sake.

So he puked, washed his face, and set off to rescue the abandoned bike from Neibolt Street, before picking a limp bunch of dandelions by the sad gravel ditch of the train tracks. Even now, he's not sure which scared him more.

"Oh God, I do remember," Richie groans. "I brought you fucking *weeds*. And this whole time I thought I was being subtle."

Eddie's smiling, his eyes far away. "You got mud all over the floor in my room. Couldn't even take the time to shake the dirt off."

"I was — I thought you'd need some cheering up," Richie says, feeling defensive of his past self, the little lovestruck geek. He should really send Ben some belated flowers too, poor fucker.

"That's putting it lightly. My mom wouldn't even let me use the phone."

Richie buries his hot face in his palms. The cloud of embarrassment lifts slightly, when Eddie starts rubbing slow circles into his back, and Richie thinks for a second about what he's actually saying.

"Wait, ever since then? *That's* your big falling in love moment, me climbing through your window with a handful of crap? Cowabunga, he's the one for me?"

"Yeah," Eddie shrugs. "I already had a huge crush on you, but that's when I knew. You said I was a *real badass* for fighting the clown off 'til you guys got there, and I... yeah."

He remembers it now, Eddie's puffy red eyes as he snatched the drooping flowers from Richie's shaky hands. They had been swollen

and bloodshot before Richie even knocked on the window, but neither of them had mentioned it.

Talk about having the rug swept out from under him. “But you — you had allergies. The only reason you didn’t yell at me was so Godzilla wouldn’t know I was there.”

Eddie glowers at the name, but he’s biting his lip, and his touch is still melting a soothing line down Richie’s back. “I kept them.”

“What?”

“I kept one of the flowers. I — I put it inside one of the comics you lent me so my mom wouldn’t know.”

Now Eddie’s the one looking like someone’s forcing him into a death row confession. But it’s — it’s always such a *relief*, always takes the sting away from Richie’s achy, pining memories, to hear they’d been reciprocated the entire time.

Kinda makes them worse, too, knowing what they could have had this entire time, if things were different.

“That’s the dorkiest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Says you, king dork. Fuck off.”

“Never,” Richie grins. “You’re such a grandma, I can’t believe this. Why *that*, of all the dumb shit I did to get you to notice me?”

Eddie sighs, and turns to look at Richie head-on, his mouth twisting like he’s chewing the words over inside. Richie waits for him, like he always will.

“It was — all the shit that happened that day, I was — I thought we were fucked. I thought I’d never see you guys again until school started, if we even made it ‘til then. I was so fucking scared, man.”

He’s rubbing his right arm as he speaks. Richie takes his hand away and holds it, instead.

“I knew you guys were just as scared as I was, even Bill. It would’ve

made sense if we all just — just ignored each other and pretended like it never happened, but you—”

“Clearly had a deathwish?” Richie butts in. “I mean, the clown was bad, but if your mom caught me bringing gay flowers into Eddie-bear’s room, then hoo sheeit. Man the harpoons boys, this one’s angry —”

“Would you shut your *hole*,” Eddie says, smacking Richie gently in the side of the head. “I’m trying to tell you something, asswipe.”

“Mea culpa, Edoardo, amore mio,” Richie says, straightening his glasses. “Per favore.”

Eddie eyeballs him. “Why are you being a freak right now? You’re mixing languages.”

“I’m nervous.”

“Well, don’t be. I’m *saying*, even after everything went to dogshit that day, you still turned up in my room like — like the only thing that mattered was whether or not I was okay.”

Richie can’t really argue with that. He shrugs helplessly, thumbing the guitar-string tendons of Eddie’s hand.

“Rich,” Eddie continues, after a moment of sitting there looking at each other, emotion and history all tangled up in a fragile web, strung between them. “In the hotel last year, in Derry, it didn’t seem like you were okay. Like — like you didn’t have anyone to bring you any fuckin’ weeds. And don’t talk to me about agents or, or publicity assholes or whatever the fuck, ‘cause that doesn’t count.”

There’s a desperate look in his wide, dark eyes, like they’re windows he needs Richie to look through, and understand. Luckily, after a year, Richie is fluent in the repressed language of Spaghetti Nation.

“Eds, are you saying you came out here to keep an eye on me?” His heart feels like it can’t swell any bigger, watching Eddie’s ears go pink as he flails his hand around, still caught in Richie’s.

“Well, somebody had to! You didn’t know how to change the oil in

your car, that mechanic was ripping you off! Before I got here you never even washed fruit before you ate it, do you know how many people touch that stuff before it ends up in the store? You might as well eat a dirty band-aid off the fucking ground — *mmph*.”

His mouth is soft and shiny with pizza grease when Richie cups his jaw to kiss him quiet. Slow, tongues sliding, as Eddie makes a small noise and crawls back over into his lap, wincing slightly as he goes.

“Also — I also came ‘cause I still wanted to get in your pants,” Eddie murmurs, arching into it as Richie pushes his hands under the shirt to hold him close around the waist.

“I *knew* it,” Richie gloats.

“So... are you okay? Rich? Not just tonight, I mean.”

He looks up. Looks at Eddie’s furrowed eyebrows, his eyes so worried even with his mouth a kissed-open mercy, and thinks about last year, when Richie dropped everything to come to Maine and not one person even fucking noticed.

“Yeah, baby,” Richie swallows. “Never better.”

Eddie sags forward into another kiss, and it’s a good thing Richie devoured most of his pizza in a post-sex rush, because it doesn’t feel like they’ll be moving any time soon.

“Is that my new name of the week? Huh? I get it, baby Eddie, needs to be coddled when he freaks out about getting fucked in the ass.”

“No, dumbass,” Richie laughs, pinching Eddie’s thigh to make him stop pretending to scowl. “As in, baby Eddie, ‘cause he’s cute and he’s *mine*.”

“Well, shit,” Eddie says. “In that case, I guess it’s okay.”

And his voice is really more breath than sound as he whispers *Richie, baby*, into his ear. He pulls off Richie’s glasses, but they’re breathing the same air, so who cares if all Richie can see is a sun-golden blur, and eyes like galaxies.

## Notes for the Chapter:

:)

your honour I'm afraid they're BOTH baby. I rest my case

i can't believe this chapter is 14k omfg me @ me  
chill out

it will be a week until the next update, to give me time to finish chapter 14, and also for personal reasons. still gonna be an active dumbass on tumblr though!! [@skinks](#)



## 12. Chapter 12

September unspools to a close like blown, liquid glass, red-hot and gorgeous. Crystal clear in Richie's mind, stained-glass beautiful days spent filling the pool back up when the hosepipe ban is lifted, nights spent fucking, and sleeping closer every time the heat relents just a little further.

It would be irresponsible to practice the big ole D in A every time. Richie knows that, and would know it even without Eddie shoving safe-sex websites under his nose like he's a harried PA and Richie's his loose cannon boss who just won't listen. More than that, it would be unrealistic. It's not even as if they have sex *every day*, Richie's horny, but he's not Genghis fucking Khan. Plus, a well-executed handjob is nothing to be sniffed at.

But they do it, as they do so many other things, with a whole lot of arguing and a whole lot more love, discovering ever more ways to make it good.

That's an understatement; Richie pretty much loses his mind the first time Eddie turns him onto his stomach one sunny afternoon. Face buried where he's hugging a pillow, shifting back into Eddie's firm strokes up his thighs, he feels gut-shot with how much he wants the emptiness *gone*.

Eddie asks him a million questions, predictably determined about being good at it. He leaves biting kisses all over Richie's ass, too, even though it's nowhere nearly as spectacular as Eddie's. It's apples and — well, not oranges, but some other, flatter fruit. It's like comparing a bony mule to a thoroughbred.

God. Even when *he's* the one getting fucked, Richie still can't stop thinking about Eddie's perfect little tuchus. It's some kind of affliction.

Eddie's so cautiously thorough in prepping that by the time he finally bottoms out, Richie's an immediate lost cause. It's never felt like this before. Hardly able to breathe through the way his whole lower body feels wrenched open, desperate, keening loudly when Eddie pulls him

back to sit over his kneeling thighs. Richie's — he's so filled up, he can almost feel Eddie's cock in the back of his throat. Like he'll be able to taste it when Eddie comes.

He might. Eddie's riding bareback, because Richie wants everything Eddie will deign to give him, all the time.

"Jeeze — Richie, hey," Eddie whispers. His hands drag reverently through Richie's soft hips, like he's carving marks in sand. "You feel really fucking good, is it—? It's okay?"

"Uh huh." He can't think. His whole body focuses on the fat drag of pressure against his entrance, feels held in place, like a steak pinned to a board. Pierced right through.

"Okay," Eddie says, sounding drunk as fuck, but determined. This is gonna be one for the books, Richie just knows it. Eddie ghosts his hand down over Richie's damp cock to tug lightly at his sack, and the pleasure curves like a stream against his prostate, caught between Eddie's fingers and his body pressed flush behind him, so good that Richie's sprawling forward again. He bites a slimy circle into the pillow to stifle his wet moaning.

"Rich, how d'you, uh — um. How d'you want it?"

"Hard," he gasps. Eddie's hand digs a slow trench up his back. Tangles into his hair, and that alone nearly does it. "Hard as you want, do whatever you want, Eddie *please*—"

"Fuck, okay — you sure you're alright?"

"Yeah," Richie laughs, the sound coarse. The bedsheets smell rank and hot with sex, slick, gummy, like the feel of the raw wool after shearing time on Mike's farm. "Just thinkin' you oughta register that dick as a concealed weapon."

"I dunno how you can think anything right now," Eddie says. He shuffles behind Richie, cupping his ass tentatively, and he's mumbling so low Richie's not sure he's even meant to hear. "I must be doin' it wrong..."

He can feel Eddie pulsing *inside him*. Their heartbeats joined and

concentrated down to the place where Richie's stretched and accommodating. There's a whole thick scalding *line* inside, like drinking something too hot and feeling it burn all the way down his gullet, except it's coming from the opposite direction. Eddie couldn't do this wrong if he tried.

Richie groans, and pushes back. "You're doing so *fucking* good, baby."

Eddie's looking strained and awestruck when Richie twists to peer over his shoulder. He nods, jerkily. Stomach fluttering in and out of concave shadow, he's breathing so heavy. Their eyes meet, and Eddie must read the lines of desperation on Richie's forehead, so close to snapping, because he bites his lip and finally puts some of that nervous energy to good use.

It's incredible. Gentle and hard and then gentle again, like Eddie keeps forgetting he's allowed to let go, that Richie wants him to. Richie's waited twenty-seven years for this, and lasts five minutes. It's noisy, all hissing breath and the smack of skin, then juvenile snorting at how noisy it is. The churn of a lawnmower butts in from nearby and somehow that's funny too, that someone should be doing something as banal as garden work while they're screwing their brains out on a Tuesday afternoon. Eddie fucks him like he's trying to make up for something. He's kissing Richie's shoulder and holding him splayed over his lap to really nail the angle when Richie comes around a cracked shout, feeling like his pelvis will split apart with how forcefully he spills all over Eddie's hand.

*"Fucking — fuck—"*

His knees butterfly against the slippery sheets, pushing his legs wider and his hips down, like his body still thinks he should be fucking into something. He hears a dirt-rough noise and then Eddie's shoving him belly-first into the wet spot, still kissing bruises like he's trying to chew through Richie's spine, still letting Richie have it.

Richie clings to one of Eddie's vein-laced forearms where it's braced by his head, and greedily takes it.

"Oh — *God* that was hot," Eddie pants, sounding amazed. "Rich, I'm gonna — I'm gonna, should I—?"

“If you pull out right now I’ll fucking kill you, Eds, holy *shit*—”

Eddie frets about it, even *apologizes* after he unloads inside, until Richie tackles him over and reminds him it’s a little late to be discerning about where his jizz goes.

“Plus,” Richie grins, poking a freckle at the tip of Eddie’s nose. He looks so fucking handsome and concerned, his eyes glowing like whiskey in the bright sunlight slotting through the shutters. Richie feels soaked all down his thighs, so he pulls Eddie in by his sweaty hair to kiss him deep and grateful. “It’s not like you can knock me up.”

Eddie gags and leaves him to chuckle triumphantly to himself, but not without a little honeyed, afterglow cuddling first.

“I think I still like getting fucked, more,” Eddie says that night, over dinner. His face is staining to rosy pink in the sunset, and he’s prodding at the gnarled bonsai tree he bought and now protects like a snarling lioness with a cub. It lives on the table, where he can keep an eye on it. “I think? Is that okay?”

“That’s cool, Eds.” They always sit close, perpendicular around one corner of the table, so Richie reaches underneath to pat him on the leg. “Course it’s okay.”

“You don’t mind?”

Of all the dumbass questions. Richie rolls his eyes so hard he collapses back into his chair, like he’s dead. “Oh yeah, it’s a real hardship,” he says to the ceiling, wishing he had a cushion for his tender ass. “No, you moron! I like fucking you. Look at that, we’re a match made in gay sex heaven.”

“I mean, not that it wasn’t good or anything,” Eddie says, hurriedly. He puts down his fork and rubs at his knees. “It was great. It’s just... listen, this is gonna sound weird.”

“Then you came to the right place, Spaghetti Man. Your weird is but a blip on my weird scale, don’t worry.”

Eddie gazes at him from under the flat line of his downtrodden eyebrows, then he's snaring their feet together. "Okay. So, uh... y'know how, my whole life, there's all this stuff that was supposed to be bad for me, right? Stuff my — my mom said I hated, but it was really just stuff *she* hated, so sometimes I dunno whether I *actually* like stuff or not. So I'm trying to think about it more. Does that make sense?"

It doesn't, but Richie will die before he discourages Eddie from talking about his wire-wool mess of feelings. He loathes the poisonous, bloated ghost of Mrs K, even more than the shadow of Derry still lurking at the very edge of his consciousness like an open grave. But he doesn't wanna upset Eddie by badmouthing her *yet again*, so he only shrugs. "I guess."

"Like hiking," Eddie explains. "I thought I hated it, but then I realized I'd never actually done it. Then we went to Joshua Tree, and it was great."

"Okay," Richie says, slowly. "And... hiking is like getting fucked? Attack of the rattlesnakes, instead of the trouser snakes?"

His grin falters when Eddie doesn't even smile. Ah, it was a bad joke anyway, though Eddie usually likes those best.

"No. Well, kind of," Eddie says. He rubs at his forehead, his glance skittering away when he sees Richie staring. "They're both... fuck it, I just mean, I'm trying to be honest with myself about this shit, about my, uh. Preferences. I mean, I like stuff!"

Richie blinks at him, nodding in a way he hopes is encouraging. "You, uh — yes. You do. Tons of stuff."

"I like hiking," Eddie says, building up steam. "I like getting high, and I like driving with the roof down even though *statistically*, if we get in an accident — uh. Never mind. I like it when you fuck me. I *like* it, and... it's not because anyone told me to. And you — you always help me find this shit out, so I just — thank you. That's all."

He picks up his fork again, decisively spearing a broccoli stem. Richie steals a piece of chicken from his plate, beaming at him when he

looks up, frowning.

“What?”

Richie chews with his mouth open, nudging Eddie’s foot. “I love you, ya dingus.”

“Oh.” Eddie smiles, his dimples coming for Richie’s very life, and steals some sweet potato right back. “I love you too.”

They crunch their veggies in silence for a minute. They’re kind of delicious, even though Richie will never admit to it beyond what clearing his plate already does. He only misses instant ramen occasionally. The bonsai seems to visibly perk up under Eddie’s stern watch, straining all its leaves to attention. Richie knows the feeling.

He strokes his pinkie down the firm little swell of Eddie’s bare tricep. The supply of ugly tank tops never seems to run dry, and Richie’s convinced Eddie’s just stealing his old shirts and cutting the sleeves off. “Y’know what it’s called when you prefer being on the bottom, and I do all the work?”

“I dunno Rich, having great fucking taste?”

That’s not what Richie was gonna say at *all*, but fuck, if Eddie isn’t a goddamn chuck connoisseur sometimes. He even thumps Richie on the back, when he chokes on his chicken from laughing too hard.

It’s a whole Bible’s worth of revelations. But life goes on, and they can’t spend all day in bed, as much as Richie would like to.

Every morning the heat eases its stranglehold around the city just a little looser, and it feels like it brightens everyone’s moods. Richie has never had as many pleasant interactions with strangers as the day the temperature drops under a hundred degrees for the first time in what feels like eons. His sunken-eyed, college victim barista actually cracks a smile when Richie tells her with a straight face that his name is *The Re-Animated Corpse of Buddy Holly*. It feels like some kind of achievement; he’s been trying to make her laugh for months.

He wears underwear to bed that night just for the novelty, and wakes up with Eddie spooning in behind him, hugging firm around his waist with his knees tucked into the dewy crooks of Richie's own.

"Morning," Eddie sighs softly, against his nape.

He sounds like he's got cotton balls in his mouth, and Richie closes his eyes against the onslaught of bliss at Eddie's breath feathering against his skin, actually warmer than the bedroom air for once.

"Howdy, señor beeg spoon. Did I wake you up?"

"Nah," Eddie yawns. He's stroking Richie's stomach so slowly, Richie has to tangle their feet together just to release some pent-up energy in case his heart explodes from his chest, like he's in an Alien movie. "Been awake for a while. You do the Voices in your sleep, it's pretty entertaining."

He feels Eddie inhaling deep behind his ear, then out again. Kissing his neck. The bed cradles them, like a warm hand, and Richie might still be dreaming.

"Are you sniffing me?"

"Yeah. I like how you stink."

"Oh, yeah. I should bottle my ball sweat, I smell so good."

"I didn't say that, I just said I like it."

He's never been more aware of his belly-button. Eddie's fondling it, dipping a finger in the notch and tugging in a way that shouldn't feel as good as it does. Richie's gonna start purring.

"So, are we just snuggling right now? We're dudes who snuggle in the morning?"

"We are when I'm not sweating my ass off. I can get up if this is too gay for you—"

"Don't you fuckin' *dare*," Richie yelps, rolling over to squash Eddie flat to the sheets, clinging for dear life. "We're never getting outta

this bed. I'm gonna break the window so they can send food in by drones."

"Won't you have to leave the bed to break the window? You're really fucking bad at planning."

Eddie's grinning at him, crooked and blotchy with sleep. Richie gently wipes the yellow crud from the corners of his eyes for him, and Eddie lets it happen.

"I'll get another drone to break the window first, duh. Stick with me, bub, I know what I'm doing."

"You're right, that's so smart," Eddie says, smiling with his eyes half-shut, warm coffee-ring crescents. "I love you."

And Richie has to kiss him all over his scratchy, angular face until Eddie's spluttering and pushing him away, and the sun shines kindly through the shutters on their lazy morning lovemaking, instead of feeling like something they have to hide from.

Eddie says it *all the time*, now.

Worries and shakes it in his obsessive terrier teeth. It feels a lot stronger than a paddleball, though, feels like it won't snap no matter how much he abuses it.

He says it during sex, or when Richie aggressively cuts off some tailgating asshole on the freeway. He says it first thing, over breakfast, or last thing at night before they go to sleep, and most of the time he says it back whenever Richie says it first.

He mouths it, silently, so tiny that Richie might have missed it if he wasn't always staring, when Richie takes him to a really nice Italian place for his birthday. *Not* Olive Garden. Richie still feels the same way he did on Valentine's, his chest aching as he stares back with his cheeks bulging full of pasta. He tries to say it back by waggling his eyebrows, and probably succeeds, because Eddie kicks him gently under the table and changes the subject.



He says it with an almost furious determination one night when he stomps into the guest bedroom Richie is converting into a soundproof box for playing his drums. Marches in like an invading army, taking Richie's hand and dragging him down the hall, the air still spicy with heat seeping in through the bug screens.

"What's — what's up, Eds? Where's the fire?" Richie says, trying not to laugh as he barks his shins against an end table.

Eddie had finally sat down to watch Richie's special, which is why Richie had been decidedly busy doing something *else*. He hates how he looks on TV. Also how he sounds. It's a miracle Eddie puts up with him, honestly, Richie wants to punch that scraggly, anemic-giraffe looking motherfucker in the face half the time.

"I fucking love you, that's what," Eddie spits, slamming the bedroom door and stripping immediately.

Richie eagerly gets with the program. Eddie's color is high, like he's horny and embarrassed about how horny he is, dumping his clothes on the floor without even *folding* them first.

"Can't believe you said all that shit in front of all those people," he hisses, kissing Richie breathless once they're naked, frantically stroking Richie fully hard, as if he needed any help.

"I — I meant all of it too, babe," Richie laughs.

"Fucking *nuts*."

Eddie's so funny when he's worked up, rougher and handsy and wound tight like a bear-trap Richie knows just how to spring.

It stops being funny the moment Eddie scrambles up on his knees to reach behind himself, fingers slicked at some point. All Richie can do is watch with his mouth catching flies, pinned down by Eddie's other hand, watch Eddie's face twist along with the cords of muscle in his hunched shoulders.

Richie thumbs Eddie's foreskin down, his own cock jumping at the bitten-off gasp. Digs welts into Eddie's snaking hips, wondering who this is a reward for. Both of them, by the looks of the spiky

exhilaration on Eddie's face as Richie deals with the condom.

"Okay, I'm — c'mon, big guy."

"Jeeze, what happens if I just stand in the street yellin' about you through a megaphone?"

"I — *ah*, slower, Jesus — I lock the front gate, now *c'mon*."

"Yes, Eddie," Richie says sweetly, and much later he's coming for what feels like hours, wrung out of him with his hands sliding down the sweating roots of Eddie's thighs, watching him watch Richie right back from where he's hanging onto the headboard behind them, grinning madly.

So, it's fair to say that Richie has never been a happier camper, breaking into spontaneous song even more than he already did. Never more *consistently* content, thanks in no small part to the slowly dissipating scourge of the heat and the fact that Eddie seems happier too.

Perhaps finally saying the words has lightened the load on Eddie's shoulders. He strolls around looser when they go downtown, his doleful eyes don't look so wounded and wary whenever Richie's showering him in affection like a drunken Cupid, maybe because he finally feels able to throw a little bit of it back.

If pressed, Richie *might* say it feels like Eddie's missing the stick from his ass. If he didn't value his nuts staying attached to his body, he might even make some kinda joke about having fucked the stick right out of him.

But he doesn't. Only privately.

The subject does rear its head eventually, since Richie's never been able to resist picking at any sort of scab. Even when the wounds healing over aren't his own.

"Uh, I dunno," Eddie shrugs.

He's like a tanned, preppy imp in his bare feet and polo, his attention divided between throwing a ball down the driveway for Oliver, and fiddling under the hood of Richie's Porsche. Gossamer clouds scud overhead against the bluejay sky, a novel sight.

"Nothing bad has happened," he continues. "They're not magic words, this isn't Derry. I wanted to tell you how I felt for so long, but I thought I'd fuck it all up, y'know?"

"Nah, I can't relate," Richie replies, thinking of a knife stolen from his mother's kitchen, and guilty splinters in his hand. He peers around the distracting sight of Eddie's wiggling ass, trying to get a peek at what the fuck he's doing to Richie's car. "I can name every single emotion I've ever had, alphabetically,"

"Dumps don't count as emotions, asshole."

Richie gasps in mock outrage. 'Cause fuck, Eddie might love him, but he's still a mouthy little shit, and that's the cherry on top of the entire incredible cake.

Loving him back could never put a dampener on Eddie's frayed-copper livewire *bullshit*, the very same kind that Richie has been addicted to ever since Eddie first heckled his recess joke-telling, so off-putting that Richie threw a book at him.

"Here's an emotion for ya, Eds," he says, watching Eddie squat down to enthusiastically rub Oliver's spotted tummy. "I love you, how d'you like them apples?"

Eddie looks up at him, bright and pleased. There's a smear of engine grease on his cheekbone that's weakening Richie's knees to a dangerous level. "Y'see? You said it all the time, and shit just got better. So I stopped bein' scared about it."

He tosses the ball to Richie, who fumbles it like an idiot, because he still loses coordination whenever Eddie drops nuggets like that without any goddamn warning. Oliver speeds triumphantly away with the ball tucked into his jowls.

"That's — that's — I'm glad, man. We're killing it. We should have an

advice podcast. Two fuckin' ninja masters of clown murder and adult relationships."

Eddie snorts, his nose wrinkling. "Please don't compare that clown bullshit to this clown bullshit."

Richie mimes zipping his mouth shut, and his heart flares happily as Eddie smirks back before he chases after the dog, foul-mouthed and loud as always.

How is it possible that Richie's somehow won the biggest of all, his hands spilling over with everything he ever wanted, and yet he's still greedy for more. Nobody warned him that he might stand here feeling like this, pleasantly hot in the sunshine, watching Eddie laugh, "Good boy! No, down, Ollie, down!"

The other day he hovered at the window of a jewelry store for so long that the assistant came peeking out to ask if he needed some assistance. Richie had panicked and escaped, but that's the third time it's happened. They're gonna start putting his picture on the walls. *Local creep too chickenshit to propose, do not approach first.*

How is it supposed to work? Is he supposed to ask Eddie if he wants to get married, before he asks him to get married? In all of the romantic comedies Richie shamelessly enjoys, it's always a surprise to the proposee, but... surely that's the romantic part. The shocked happiness on Eddie's face in Richie's daydreams.

Eddie, who's only six weeks free of endless divorce drama. He might be allergic to marriage now, too.

Nobody told him, Richie thinks, that it was possible to have someone in your arms every night, your house every day, in your life all year, and still *long* for them.

But then, Richie has always been greedy when it comes to Eddie. The gamble paid off the first time, last September, and these days Richie's feeling like the luckiest guy in the world. Shit might just keep getting better.

“—can you believe that? And then the producer wanted me to call Bill on the air to get spoilers for the movie.”

*“I think Bill’s perfectly capable of spoiling his own stories without your help.”*

“Oh zing,” Richie whoops. “Get him, Mikey. So what’s Atlanta like, anyway? Is your whole body a peach yet? Don’t answer that, you’re a peach already.”

*“Thank you, Richie, I appreciate it. I’m not in Atlanta yet, I flew to New Orleans first.”*

“What the fuck for? Does New Orleans even exist when it isn’t Mardi Gras?”

*“Yes, oh my God. No wonder you live in Los Angeles, you don’t understand the meaning of the word culture.”*

Richie grins down the phone, pacing in lazy bumblebee circles around the terrace. “You’re one to talk. I thought you had your heart set on Florida.”

*“That’s still the dream, man. But I’m busy right now.”*

“Eating po’boys?”

*“No! Well, yeah, they’re delicious. I’ll bring you one.”*

“Dude, you know I’d have your babies in a heartbeat, but I’m not eating a sandwich that’s been in your car for a day.”

*“Your loss. Listen though, there are so many fascinating stories down here, it kinda makes me wonder whether Derry was the only... y’know.”*

“Nest of evil bastard clowns?”

*“Supernatural center, that’s what Bill and I are calling it.”*

Richie makes a fart noise into the mic. “Boring.”

*“It’s not boring, there are all of these incredible accounts of black magic,*

*haunted buildings, and Ben was telling me—*”

“Haunted? What the fuck have those guys *done* to you! I don’t believe in fuckin’ ghosts, man, no way.”

There’s a buzzing silence on the line. Richie checks it hasn’t disconnected, then looks around the dusk-dim garden in case he’s missed some nest of killer wasps, or something. “N’yello? Farmer Mike? Did a gator get’cha?”

*“You’re telling me, after everything, you don’t believe in ghosts?”*

“Well, yeah?” Movement from the kitchen window catches his eye, and Richie shields his glasses from the sun’s last fighting blaze to see. “None of that shit we had to deal with was ghosts, Jingles the Jester was an alien. You said so yourself, and you weren’t even coked out on ayahuasca, that time. *Aliens*, I believe in. Remember in high school, when we were gonna—”

*“When we were gonna do the shortwave radio UFO conspiracy thing, yeah. I remember.”*

“I even made us those tinfoil hats,” Richie sighs. The movement tweaks his peripheral again and he sets off towards the sliding doors to investigate. “What a waste.”

*“I still don’t see how it’s such a leap to believe—”*

Mike’s incredulous voice is drowned out by the droning vacuum when Richie steps into the shady kitchen, his eyes taking a moment to adjust. And then, well.

Richie loves the guy, but it’s hard to compete with the sight of Eddie bumbling around in his underwear, singing badly along to whatever’s playing through his earbuds jammed in tight.

*“—hell is that noise—?”*

“Edster’s losing it,” Richie yells. Eddie spins around to see the undoubted manic glee on Richie’s face, and flips him off without losing his place in the song. “For some reason he thinks the house needs to be clean *before* we go to Atlanta.”

Eddie shuffles over, all dumbass flip-flop tan lines and sinewy edges fuzzed with the heat. He's nicely muscled in a way that still gets Richie's blood pumping, no matter how often he dedicates himself to licking the barely-there bumps of Eddie's abs.

*"Why isn't your house clean anyway? I thought that's why he moved in,"* Mike drawls, the asshole. Always too smart for the Losers; suddenly they had no grounds to claim ignorance about shit when Mike joined the club, way back.

"Right? I'm not paying him enough," Richie shouts, over the noise.

Eddie yanks one earbud out and starts vacuuming Richie's body, looking wily.

"What'cha doing, babe?"

"I'm cleaning you, 'cus I love you," Eddie says with great concentration, his pointed tongue poking out one corner of his mouth. "Also 'cause you're gross, did you roll in the fucking grass?"

*"That's the most Eddie thing I've ever heard."*

Richie grins down at him. "Homeschool says hi."

"Hi Mike," Eddie yells, *right* next to Richie's ear, Jesus, and then—

"Fuck," Richie mumbles, pulled down and off balance.

His glasses dig into Eddie's forehead for a second and then it's better, tilting to fit his fingers under Eddie's ear with his thumb brushing his cheek. They sigh into it, pressing closer. Eddie kicks the vacuum off at some point, skimming his hand up under Richie's shirt, all bare skin and heat and dragging Richie's bottom lip slowly through his teeth to make him *moan*—

*"Guys, I'm very moved, but I am still here,"* comes Mike's voice, tinny and amused from where Richie's arms are wrapped around Eddie's shoulders.

"Shit, oh shit," Eddie bleats, breaking away immediately. His eyes are glassy and his mouth gleams, and Richie has to shake his head like a

dog with water in its ear.

“Michael, I’m so sorry you had to hear that. Eds has a case of Tozieritis, and it’s terminal.”

Eddie punches his thigh in an instant dead-leg like a sniper as he picks up the vacuum, dimples winking in his red face.

*“I’ve heard of that. It’s like, brain worms or something, right?”*

“Oh hah, right, everyone trash the Trashmouth! I’m gonna sit at my own fuckin’ table at the service, then you’ll all see,” Richie says, feeling attacked from all angles. He rubs his leg and leans over to watch Eddie’s ass as he retreats in his shame down the hall.

*“I’m sure you’ll have company, Patty has a lot of nephews and nieces who can sit at the kids’ table with you.”*

“Ah, my true demographic. Nice.”

*“I’ll pick you up on Thursday, alright? Three-thirty, in the arrivals parking lot.”*

“Aw man, no big sign at the gate? No glitter-glue and balloons?”

*“Absolutely not. You’re famous, that means it’s our job to take you down a peg or two. No balloons. Tell Eddie to bring mosquito repellent, okay?”*

“Yep. Pretty sure he cleared the shelf at CVS already, but I will. See ya, Mikey.”

*“Bye, man.”*

The kitchen looks neat as a nun’s cooch to him, but it wouldn’t be a bad idea to get himself in Eddie’s good books a couple days before they have to take a five hour flight. They’re both gonna be nervous enough in the lead-up to the memorial without getting on each other’s nerves, thirty-five thousand feet up in the air.

Besides, Eddie might be more inclined to continue whatever *that* little stunt was if Richie helps out.



Twilight blackens into night outside. L.A. shimmers like an oil slick out beyond the garden. The heatwave might be close to officially ending, but the long months previous have seeped indelibly into Richie's bones.

He's whistling, and taking a break from the very hot, arduous work of dishwasher-stacking by standing in front of the little electric fan they keep on the counter. He wafts up his t-shirt, cooling his belly.

If the others are having as nerve-wracking a time writing their speeches about Stan, it's gonna go worse than his Bar Mitzvah. Not that it was a bust to Richie, it was a goddamn barnstormer as far as he's concerned. Call the papers, Stan the Man's gone rogue and he's taking no shit, no sir.

Richie had chased him down to the Barrens afterwards to sing his praises, 'til the guy stopped looking like he was gonna throw up and started cussing Richie out for his jokes about circumcision. He'd sat primly on a rock, knotting fingers in his tallit like he was trying to unpick the weight of tradition from his shoulders. Richie tried his best, and eventually Stan's bowed-in mouth had buckled into one of his big, rare smiles. Laughing like one of his precious loon birds.

Richie's stomach roils, remembering. He hopes Stan remembered too, before he went.

Eddie clears his throat, behind him.

Richie turns, and he's either a bad fucking friend or a real sex-addicted gremlin, 'cause his weighty thoughts are banished in an instant. The two aren't mutually exclusive. He likes to think Stan would be happy for him.

That's a laugh and a half; Stan would find them both intolerable together if he were still around.

"Jesus," Richie chokes, frozen with his shirt pulled halfway up his stomach.

"Hey," Eddie says, sizing him up.

Recently, it's become mind-breakingly clear that the more apparent

Richie makes his feelings known about just how hot Eddie gets him, the more Eddie seems to grow into this new, diabolical confidence.

That might explain why he's leaning in the doorway, a cocky grin on his face to match the tilt of his hips, the jaunty angle of his legs, crossed at the ankles.

His lean legs, wrapped up to the knees in long, athletic socks. Pulled up over his tight calves, white and red contrasting with his dark body hair and matching his jockstrap, straining to keep him tucked in.

Jesus fucking Christ. He's all neat, color-coordinated lines even when he's looking to get fucked. The jock only comes out when Eddie's feeling particularly randy — which is fine. His cock is too beautiful to cover up all the time, it'd be a crime against nature. It'd be a crime against dicks, Richie feels very strongly about it. Richie—

Richie's *doomed*.

"Hey," Eddie says again, when Richie doesn't answer.

He sounds patient, which is unlike him, but maybe he knows it's gonna take a second or two for Richie's brain to pull itself free from the high-speed wreck Eddie's just caused.

"Eds," Richie says, slowly, rooted to the spot as Eddie wanders over. "Am I hallucinating again?"

"Depends what you think you're hallucinating, I s'pose. And whether or not you thought the dishwasher things were snacks." Eddie hooks one finger in the back of a sock and pulls it higher. Richie bites indents into his lip.

"Did someone spike your drink tonight?" He goes, easy as a lamb, when Eddie grabs his shirt and tugs him to the couch. "Did you spike your drink? Did you self-spike?"

"Why do I hafta be drugged to want sex with you," Eddie grumbles. He's all frowny pink in a stripe across his cheeks and, fuck, Richie better put a ring on that soon because he really, *really* likes it. "I am attracted to you, y'know."

Richie grins, going hot all over, hotter than he already was despite the fan. "Say it ain't so!"

"Unbelievable, I know. Dumbass." Eddie's smiling when Richie ducks in to kiss him, tender and promising. He feels Eddie flicking open the fly of his shorts, and, alright—

"Wait," Eddie says, stopping. *Why the fuck is he stopping?* "Do you actually wanna—? I never asked."

Richie takes over for him, shucking his shorts and briefs off in one go, flinging them over the back of the couch. "Gonna gag you with one of those socks if you ask any more stupid questions."

"Gross, Rich."

"The sock part or the gag part?"

"Just sit down!"

He does, on the serape that's usually draped over the back of the couch. Mostly to annoy Eddie, but even faux-leather sticks to your ass when shit gets sweaty. Can't be too careful.

"You got a condom?"

"Yes, obviously." Eddie produces it from... somewhere, along with the lube. Richie swipes his tongue over his lip, feeling out of his depth yet again.

"What's obvious about this!"

He forgot to close the kitchen blinds, and the open-plan is still aglow with golden light. Trees shade most of the garden, but any intrepid stalker with a telescope is gonna get a real eyeful, Richie's semi stiffening up in his palm. It doesn't need much convincing; the ferny trail of hair pouring down Eddie's stomach is right in his face. The red lines on the socks loop around the knots of his calves, matching the jock where it's stretched and revealing over Eddie's hardness. He looks like some intense, pin-up version of an eighties track athlete. He looks like the guys in the stained magazine Richie discovered one day in the Barrens, and dropped again, like it was burning as hot as

his face.

Richie pinches himself. “Is this some kinda special occasion?”

“Kind of,” Eddie says. He puts one foot up on the couch, between Richie’s legs. “We’re gonna be in Atlanta for a week.”

Richie blinks, distracted from cupping the fluting curve of his ankle. Is it gross that he wants to pull the socks off with his teeth? Maybe this is why Eddie was vacuuming, so they wouldn’t get dirty.

“So?”

Eddie’s hands move from where they’re planted on his hips to tangle in Richie’s hair, pulling him close. Which is great. It’s fucking superb, Richie’s down, already biting at Eddie’s stomach and taking hold of his waistband in his teeth to relieve some of the pressure on his dick.

“So,” Eddie grates out, like Richie’s being deliberately dumb. Anyone would be a little slow on the uptake when their boyfriend ambushes them, looking like *porn*. “We’re not doing this in the — *ahh*, the hotel.”

Richie pulls wetly off his cock and looks up at his hazy face, wounded, and already one finger deep. Eddie’s considerably slick and stretched already, probably because he doesn’t care if Richie outright collapses. “We’re not?”

“Nope.”

“Nothing? For a whole week?”

“Not nothing, just — no fucking. In the ass,” Eddie adds, blushing like a stoplight. “I don’t need the others giving me shit for walking funny. And, like hell are we doing it in a bed *other people* might’ve fucked in, Jesus Christ.”

Richie hates these random, hypothetical Atlantans for putting the brakes on his sex life. “I don’t believe this, are you gonna sleep on the floor, too? Have you seen the hotel’s website? The prices aren’t even *listed*, I’m pretty sure they wash the sheets!”

"I don't care, it's weird!" Eddie's leg is shaking where Richie's sucking at the big, high-strung tendon of his groin. His fingers gouge ten bright points of pressure into Richie's shoulders. "Take it or leave it."

"You mean I gotta sustain myself on one final fuck?" Richie groans, pulling Eddie down by the straps into a straddle, the couch creaking. "Nobody knows what a sadist you are, Eds! They all think I make your life hell, but this is the definition of cruel and unusual!"

"Stop being a baby. I'll blow you in the shower."

"Why don't you fuck me again? I don't care if Billiam sees me walking like John Wayne, everyone deserves to know what a big cock you—"

"Shut up! You'll be fine," Eddie grins, settling in. He starts rubbing himself nice and slow against Richie's hardon, rucking his shirt up to his armpits. And when he puts it like that, it's hard for Richie's addled brain to argue. "You were fine before. Just gotta make this one count."

"Is that the reason for the, uh... these guys? 'Cus I don't know how much I can make it count when I'm only gonna last two seconds."

Eddie's breathing shallowly into the hollow of his mouth, when Richie trails his hands up his calves, fiddling with the ribbed cuffs. It's nothing *pervy*, the socks just highlight the shape of his legs, so ropy and spare from running, another unique part of him that Richie loves beyond reason. Strong, and fast. Good for kicking monsters in the face.

When he looks up again, Eddie's meeting his eyes, dark and focused. "No, it's, you — you think they're hot. And I like it when, uh."

God almighty.

Eddie's confidence about sex has blown through the roof lately, but this particular shit still seems to vex him. Still drives Richie wild to hear him veer close to it, though.

"You're hot, Eds," he murmurs, spiralling closer with every slow drag

of their cocks together. “This is so hot, are you kidding? Look at you.”

He could go swimming in the black sheen of Eddie’s eyes, fixed on his. “Yeah?”

“Yeah, fuck. But only if you’re into it too, it’s fuckin’ weird if you’re like... dressing up for me, or something.” He squints, pointing a finger in Eddie’s face. “Did you hire yourself as my slutty secretary, and I just didn’t notice?”

Eddie shoves his shoulder and then they’re both laughing, tucked into one another.

“Fucking cocky ass,” Eddie snorts, kissing Richie’s nose and smudging his glasses in the process. Richie’s never cleaning them again. “Course I’m into it. If you think I’d do this shit just to get your rocks off, your head’s bigger than I thought. There’s your Tozieritis.”

“Nah, I’ve got Kaspbrak Fever. That’s when your boyfriend’s so hot it burns when you pee. And when you come, actually, it’s all the same hole.” He digs both hands into the smooth curve of Eddie’s ass, reveling in his disgusted noise, in the way his hips bear down on the three fingers Richie’s twisting inside. “They are hot, though. I told you. I just keep knocking this shit outta the park.”

“Yeah,” Eddie says, flushed and feral-looking with how hungrily he’s staring down at Richie. “Guys never shoulda stopped wearing these things.”

“Right?”

“Shit peaked in the eighties. I — *oh shit*, uh — no one laughed at my fanny pack back then. Oh — oh fuck, Rich.”

“Eds, *everyone* laughed at your fanny pack,” Richie says, shakily, as he inches carefully inside.

“Fuck you.” Eddie grinds his forehead against Richie’s, one hand stuffed into the jockstrap, unmoving. “Least I was prepared. Who carried your spare contacts around all through junior year, huh?”

“Are you really talking about this right now?” Richie’s straining like, all his muscles trying not to thrust up too abruptly.

He gets Eddie’s tongue in his mouth for an answer, pushing his head back into the couch, and then Eddie’s making muffled noises of protest, sitting back up on his knees.

“Ah, shit, wait. I wanted to try it — hold on.” He climbs off, and Richie’s literally gonna implode with frustration until Eddie turns and sits himself back down, kneeling over his thighs with his back pressed to Richie’s constricting chest.

Richie sits, frozen. Hands hovering like satellites. Feels Eddie’s fingers guiding his slicked cock, and then he’s enveloped again, panting into the valley of Eddie’s spine.

“Holy — *fucking shit*—”

“Okay?” Eddie says, and Richie can’t see his face this way, but he sounds breathless with it already. “Okay, Rich? You can — go for it.”

His hands settle on Richie’s trembling knees, and he’s riding back, and Richie can see *everything*.

“What the fuck kinda *research* have you been watching?” he gasps.

He grips desperate at Eddie’s hips and licks the line of sweat rolling down his back. *Thank God for long legs*, he thinks, planting his heels on the floor to get leverage.

“Nothing! It just — Jesus *fuck*, right there — just, been thinkin’ about it.”

Richie squeezes his eyes shut. It’s still a lot, knowing Eddie’s harboring the same nasty-ass thoughts as Richie behind his butter-wouldn’t-melt eyes.

“Scandalous. Eddie-kins has a — *ah*, a dirty mind, who knew! Happy birthday to me.”

“Yeah,” Eddie says, eyes gleaming as he peers back over his shoulder. Richie will never get over this, watching, feeling himself slide in and

out of Eddie's tight body. Angling for the spot that gets Eddie *jolting* so hard, Richie feels it all down his cock and into his bladder. It's the fact that it's Eddie, his best friend, his boyfriend, the man he wants to peel out of a wedding tux, it's actually him that's slowly pulling Richie's orgasm into himself. Not a memory or a fragmented dream Richie would wake up from in years gone by, devastated without knowing why, and aching to chase it back into sleep.

"Ah — God—"

"Yeah," Eddie says again, "I guess I've — I've got — *hnn*—"

He's shaking, his head hanging low between his shoulders as Richie reaches around, pawing at Eddie's erection with his own climax building.

"Eds? Babe, you alright?"

"*Tozieritis*," Eddie warbles, and he's laughing, Richie realizes with delight. "So *stupid*."

Richie cracks up too, and they fuck like that, Eddie choking through his giggles and caught between Richie's legs, as Richie winds his fist into elastic to pull him back down onto his cock, over, and over.

They fly to Georgia a couple of days later, Eddie looking veiny and thunderous as he shifts delicately around like there's a landmine in his seat.

Richie tries not to laugh at him, but he makes it so difficult.

"Didn't analyze that risk too well, didja Eds?" he whispers, under the fruitless drone of the safety announcement that Eddie always nods along to, just so the flight attendants don't feel unappreciated.

"Shut. The fuck. Up."

"You *did* say to make it count."

Eddie's jaw ticks, and he levels a look at him with absolute murder in



his eyes. Richie hastily offers him some dried apricots, because Eddie is allergic to airplane peanuts, and Richie loves him and doesn't want him to die with a sore ass.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

we're goin' to georgia folks!

when i finished chapter 11 i was like "phew, that's the last sex scene i have to write" and then i completely underestimated how much they'd want to fuccccccc. i feel like i'm exposing a lot of my own [eddie voice] Preferences in this fic. hachi machi. richie tells the barista his bad buddy holly joke because he's a huge buddy holly fan in the novel, and that's always stuck with me for some reason, bless him.

[@skinks](#) u know this by now

## 13. Chapter 13

### Notes for the Chapter:

sorry if you haven't seen the 1988 classic Die Hard  
but, what are you doing with your life

Atlanta is hot too, but in a different way. Swamp-humid and leaden with mosquitos in the evening by the time Mike gets them to the hotel, the air so wet and green it's like walking through a foggy jungle.

It's a stately, country club type place, squatting next to a golf course with ivy veiling the old face of it like a turn-of-the-century bride. Stan had rich buddies in his ornithology society, apparently, and they're loaning the space out for free. All the Losers had offered to chip in, because it's not exactly as if any of them are hard up, but Stanley was well-liked. Not surprising.

In any case, the whole shindig is benefitting a suicide prevention charity, so they all wind up collectively donating enough to rent the place out six times over, anyway.

Eddie fell asleep on the plane despite his ass, as soon as L.A. started looking like a microchip from the window, four hour's worth of saliva puddling onto Richie's shoulder. He'd looked so young, all his crow's feet and woodcut laughter lines smoothing out with every snore. Richie could barely take a drink of water for fear of disturbing him. He'd stayed so rigid the entire flight he's developed a crick in his neck as a result, and he's exhausted, but it's far from the worst thing he's endured for Eddie's sake. Far from the worst he *would* endure, either.

He doesn't wanna look too close at what he'd do for Eddie. If his Deadlights vision had come true, if Richie had been even a second slower, he's certain he'd have given up, and stayed down in the dark until even the dark caved in.

He did take a selfie, though. *Fly american and cute dudes will drool all over u. @AmericanAir pay me. #whoisthisguy*

Somebody's gotta sustain the Eddie fans on Twitter, since he won't make an account himself.

"I'm in the room next door," Mike says, raising his eyebrows at them on the landing. "If I hear a single suspicious noise, you guys are comping anything I take from the minibar."

"That's not fair," Eddie huffs. The back of his neck is pink, but he's talking in a circular way about their *sex life*. To their *friend*. Richie can hardly believe it. "How do you decide what counts as suspicious?"

"If you don't know what counts as suspicious I'm kinda worried about you, honestly."

"Don't you have headphones?"

"Jesus, man," Mike laughs. Richie's imagination revs up, and he looms into Eddie a little. "Even that should cost you a bag of M&M's, or something."

Eddie grins, and finally gets the door open. Richie isn't helping, because he's fucking tired and his neck still hurts. "Shut up, Mike."

Mike claps Eddie jovially on the shoulder, and heads for his own room. "There's a *lot* of stuff in that minibar, I'm just saying."

"You should sleep before dinner, Rich," Eddie says, setting his bags down carefully. Why the fuck he needs *two* of them for six days is anyone's guess. He frowns when Richie dumps their shared suit bag on the desk, kicking his shoes off with a thump against the dark oak fortress of the bed.

"I'll mess up my rhythms if I sleep, dude," Richie says, peeling his socks off.

"Your rhythms."

"Yeah, my — whaddaya call them, my cicada rhythms. If I'm not careful, I might sleep for seventeen years and only wake up to scream and fuck."

Eddie hums. "How is that different from what you do already?"

Richie throws his socks in Eddie's face, cackling as his ping-pong reflexes kick in to slap them away. "Somebody's feeling fuckin' *refreshed*. Nah, I know what I gotta do."

"What's that — oh."

"Fists with your toes, babe," Richie grins. Swanky places like this always have the best carpet. "Straight from the church of John McClane."

Eddie's fragile air of disapproval dissolves, breaking like dawn into a goofy smile. He whips his own socks off too.

"Fists with your toes."

Of course he has to marry Eddie. Why would he marry anyone who didn't share his deep, emotional bond with Die Hard?

"Huh," Eddie says. He steadies himself with a hand to Richie's shoulder, not even looking up when Richie smacks a kiss to the top of his head. "It really does work."

"Of course it works, one hot supercop can't be wrong! Listen though, it's late as fuck and I'm wiped. Let's get some room service up in this motherfucker. Meaning me." Richie's so sweaty from travelling it'd be fighting a losing battle just to put his socks back on, let alone find somewhere downtown to eat. He bullies Eddie into a warm, messy hug. "I'm the motherfucker."

"You know what that means, right? If you're the motherfucker?" Eddie sounds muffled, squashed against Richie's collarbone. "I finally get to be the one who says yippee-ki-yay."

"So say it, Rhinestone."

Eddie clears his throat, and when he speaks his voice is unnaturally gruff. "Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker."

"Yes," Richie cheers. "And Spagheddie-o saves Nakatomi Plaza!"

Eddie's eyes dance happily in the lamplight, watching Richie pump his fist. "That felt good."

"Sounded good too. You'd look so hot in that crusty-ass wifebeater, I'd kiss you in the back of a limo any day."

"I'll keep that in mind," Eddie snorts, still looking pleased with himself. He squeezes Richie's gurgling middle. "I thought you wanted food?"

He does. If there's anything that can distract him from food it's Eddie being an idiot with him, but he's really gonna chew his own arm off if they have to wait for a taxi, or Mike. "I do, I want room service. Let's get *served*, babe, live a little."

"Okay," Eddie says, and bumps his forehead to Richie's shoulder. "I'll tell Mike."

They eat enough room service that Richie's stomach feels tight as a groaning drum. It doesn't help at all that Eddie keeps him entertained by doing terrible Hans Gruber impressions, until they're both laughing themselves nauseous. The nighttime heat sticks like barbecue sauce, but the A/C is far better than at home, so they curl around each other and sleep to the whisper of the golf course sprinkler system, like the boring, middle-aged losers they are.

The memorial is a lot more lighthearted than Richie expected.

It almost feels like a wedding, loud conversation and kids underfoot, a sea of kippahs like intricate lily pads in the southern sunset.

"I want us to celebrate Stanley's life," Patricia Uris says. She stands in the middle of the hotel's ornate mahogany crown of a dining hall with a microphone, her willowy smile far less wan in person. "I know many of us weren't able to do that, this time last — last year."

She's elegant, Richie thinks. Kind. She'd come over to shake all of their hands, chatting excitedly as they'd waited for Bill and his wife to arrive on the steps outside. Hair as golden as the rims of her round, scholarly glasses. Just as kind as Stan. She probably never

called him an asshole, even though he could be one, sometimes.

Richie's worked up with frothing nerves, and so is Eddie. It's the speeches, the not knowing anyone else here, knowing a different Stan than the one all these people were familiar with.

It's not just the speeches. A minor spat over Richie not wearing a tie had devolved into a full-blown shouting match up in their room, only stopped when Richie clawed at his tightening throat, remembering the braindead space of the Deadlights and yelling, "I can't fuckin' breathe with those things on, I can't, Eds, *you* of all people—"

And Eddie had sagged, lessened, like a porcupine flattening its spikes. "I — I — okay, I'm. I thought you were just being — sorry, Rich."

Eddie looked around the crowded hall as soon as they walked in, side by side. Teeming with a mixed bag of Patty's family and Atlanta bigwigs, more blue blood than a Romanov picnic, and every last one of 'em in a tux. He'd caught Richie's eye, quickly pulled off his own tie with a sheepish, private smile, and stuffed it into his pocket. Richie only smiled back, and gathered Eddie's shoulders under his arm.

"It's still weird," Eddie mutters, as they look at the photograph propped on a table next to the donation book. "He looks the same. It's weird no matter how many times I see pictures of him."

The ledger is a menagerie of different handwriting, pages of heartfelt lines about Stan. Richie can't bring himself to read them.

"You look the same, Eds, but you were always a cutie. I look the same. Hanscom's the only one who *grew into his looks*, Bev is such a liar."

He knows what Eddie means. Stan and Patty smile out from behind glass, on vacation somewhere. There's the same serious eyes, the same corkscrew hair, the same question-mark curl to his top lip, like he was never quite sure if his input was welcome.

"He's really gone," Eddie says, softly. Richie looks down to see his mouth trembling.

A putrid thought bubbles to the surface of his mind, that no amount of donations or hotlines could have saved anyone, if they knew what Stan knew. He takes Eddie's hand, to steady them both.

The speeches go fine.

Patricia introduces them as *Stanley's oldest friends*. Richie knows how to speak on a stage, but his stomach still knots like a pit of snakes. This is a lot more important than some stupid jokes.

Stan's parents are long since gone, so there's nobody to call bullshit on the version of him they all conjure up in their stories. It's the real version, anyway. The genuine article, the authentic Stan the Man, stamped with Loser approval. Beverly's is sharp, and witty, and Mike has the most napkins dabbing at eyes. Eddie's throat bobs like a buoy in a storm as he stands up, but he doesn't stumble over his words once, and neither does *Bill*, and Richie loves his friends so fucking much his hands hurt from clapping.

He only chokes up once, after Ben sits down to a tsunami of applause and the whole room drinks to their memories.

*Derry didn't win*, he thinks. *We won*.

Beverly hands him her fancy cloth napkin on one side, and Eddie squeezes his hand under the table on the other, fierce and hot. People will remember Stan long after Derry's just a smear on the map, like the ichorous remnants of a spider smashed to a wall.

There's music after the meal, and dancing. The party spills out onto the marbled terrace, the navy blue Georgia night wrapping around them like a rich, crushed velvet cushion around the jeweled hotel.

They're something of a sideshow to these people, he and Bill. Richie more so, but that's what trending on Netflix for a month will do to a guy. Bill is cornered by what looks like every book-club member of Atlanta's elite, and Richie stifles a laugh at his patient expression fraying as thin as his hair. A waiter finally comes back with Richie's fifth White Russian and he extricates himself from the gaggle of excited teenagers who think his special is, *like, such a mood*, and follows the loamy scent of cut grass outside.

The moon is yellow, and huge, like the light in a dentist's chair. He weaves tipsy around bodies, past Mike and Patty, who look more like they're engaged in an intense, nerdy conversation than they're actually dancing. He changes course to bump deliberately into Eddie so he falls against Beverly, scooting away from their twin shouts of, "Asshole!"

Bev had groaned and pulled Eddie to his feet, after he'd turned down yet another pretty woman flitting over to their table to ask him to dance. Twisting his hands and stuttering, nothing but blank panic in his big, dark, hunters-shot-my-mother eyes.

"No, I'm not — thank you, sorry — I'm gay," he'd blurted to the fourth one, looking like he'd rather shrink into his collar. She'd floated away like a butterfly to the next table, bewildered.

Richie fucking lost it. "That doesn't mean you can't dance with girls, Eds! They don't have *cooties*."

"I can't dance, period," Eddie snapped, turning red as Richie howled. "Shut up, dickhead!"

Bev had smiled like a witch, and said, "Let me be the judge of that."

And so there they are, yammering together as they twirl to the boring jazz stuff Richie's sure he's supposed to like, now that he's an adult. It still sucks, though.

Richie can't blame any of the women for homing in on Eddie, among the zoo of well-dressed men inside. He'd actually gone to a *tailor*, and his suit is a deep blue three-piece, shining like midnight under the bougie lightbulbs strung around the patio. He'd donated his boxy old one after his last divorce hearing, the one that made him look like a kid playing dress-up.

It's a huge fucking improvement, in Richie's opinion.

He spots Ben sitting alone in a shadowy corner and makes a beeline, still looking back over his shoulder at Eddie's narrow waist in his vest, his hair unsticking with the bayou heat to hang in his eyes as he laughs. No wonder he has admirers, he looks almost *roguish* with his



filament scar bisecting a dimple. Richie will always prefer his west coast Eddie, the stubbly one in block color nylon shorts, and tank tops so old and stretched they show his ribs, but he gets it. The whole, mysterious stranger thing. None of these women know Eddie gets excited about buying Tupperware, or that he washes his hands roughly thirty times a day.

Neither do they know about all the hickeys curled like fallen leaves up Eddie's inner thighs, under those suit pants clinging to his legs.

In fairness to the guy, nowadays he only washes his hands so much because he's usually dirty from helping the gardener, or from tooling around in the garage, or because he refuses to cook without decontaminating himself to a surgical degree.

Jesus Christ, Richie's lucky. He really oughta be pissing around Eddie in a circle.

One kind of golden ring is as good as another if they're saying the same thing, right?

He throws himself into the wrought-iron chair beside Ben, scraping it noisily across the flagstones. "Pip-pip, Benjamin. Is this the already drunk corner? Mind if a chap joins in?"

Ben shakes his head, grinning around the crescent of his bourbon glass. He looks so distinguished. Gray in his temples, and it makes him look like — like a snow leopard or something. Richie found a little white sucker curling down his forehead a few months back and suffered an entire mid-life crisis before breakfast, until Eddie told him to grow up and just pull it out if it bugged him so bad.

"Hello, Richie. What is it about me that always brings out the British Guy, huh?"

"You're so dreamy, Ronaldo, I get nervous," Richie slurs, patting him fondly on his *very* firm shoulder. It's true. He and Bev had pulled up to the hotel's manicured parking circle in some sculpted, gullwing car, stepping out like a pair of goddamn models. Why are all of Richie's friends hotter than him?

Speaking of, Ben's staring over at the dancing like he's some tragic hero, windswept on a moor in weird saggy pants and a cravat. Sideburns, that whole vibe. Cholera.

"Ah, I get it," Richie says, trying to be more reasonable with his drink this time. "This is the *wistful pining* corner, not the drunk one. My mistake. D'you want a pen?"

"What?"

"So you can write *Mr Ben Marsh* on your napkin? Little hearts? If you got a boner right now I wanna see it, I'm making a Losers-exclusive spreadsheet."

"Beep beep, Richie," Ben says absently, glancing back at him. His voice drops to a hush, like he's telling some big secret. "Look at her. She chose me, man. *Me*."

Bev's laughter wobbles high over the jazz, the funny zebra honk she always makes when they're all being idiots on Skype. Richie's face is kinda numb from the vodka, but also from how much he can't stop smiling.

"And why wouldn't she? You're a great guy, Haystack." He ruffles Ben's perfect, silky hair, and *seriously*, what the fuck? Did Richie miss out on drinking some magic hunk juice, back in Derry? What is he doing wrong? Maybe he should start using conditioner. At least Eddie thinks he's hot.

"Stop that," Ben laughs.

Richie stops, because messing around has the lights doubling. He grips the table's edge to stop it from sliding away. "Seriously — seriously, she picked a great guy. The best. Best guy."

"So is Bill," Ben mutters, raising an eyebrow.

Bill has finally managed to escape the yuppie brigade, Richie can spot him by the way the crowd parts, obliging like a shoal of glittering fish. He's caught his arm around Audra and they're joining the dance, the light glancing off her pale arms, her fiery red hair. A coincidence is only a coincidence until you really know all the parties involved,

know them right back to preschool. Richie wonders whether he wasn't the only one who left Derry with a certain *type* still lodged in his subconscious, stuck under his skin like a burr. First loves are a helluva thing.

He turns back, and points his sloshing drink in Ben's woebegone face. "Big Bill is also married, man."

"That didn't seem to stop you," Ben says flatly, but he's never been any good at keeping a straight face.

"Hey!" Richie's friends may all be gorgeous, but they're still dicks. That's why they're friends with him, he guesses. Among other reasons. He flicks an ice chip Ben's way, good-naturedly. "So was Eddie, so was Bev, yeah, yeah, we're all big fat hippo — hypocrites. We should change the name."

"Huh?"

"From the Losers' Club, we should change it. To the Homewreckers' Club."

"Nah," Ben says, smiling a little wicked, and that's definitely one of Bev's. "I don't think we wrecked anything that didn't need fixing."

Richie's — too drunk to think about that right now.

He clears his throat. "Speaking of marriage..."

"Oh no."

"When are you gonna be a fuckin' gentleman and tie the knot, dude! You better make me your best man, I give the greatest speeches. I won't even make any dick jokes, I promise. I might mention that time in senior year though, remember? On my birthday?"

"No, no, no, Richie—"

"When Bev wore that tube top and you crashed your fucking *bike*—"

"Please don't!" Ben laughs again, and the kind slivers of his eyes still disappear when he does, like they do when he smiles, like they

always did. Another thing that hasn't changed. Like he was so happy to be a Loser he could hardly bear to look.

"You can do a whole show if you like, just please don't tell that story. But yeah, we've — we've been talking about it. There's still... I mean, you know what her ex was like, Richie."

"Oh." Richie leans out of Ben's space, his sky-high heart sobering a little. "Yeah."

He does know. He'd tried not to let it show on the call, but he'd been so fucking furious the night Beverly opened up to them all, gray-faced with her hand on Ben's knee. Tried to school his expression into patient understanding, while a sick helplessness boiled inside. Eddie was worse, leaving to sit silently by the pool once the Skype window closed. Richie had badgered him into analyzing the risk of taking out a hit on the scumbag, but the odds weren't great. Doesn't change the fact that Richie meant it. Hell, he's killed one bullying fuckhead before, all on his ownsome, what's one more?

The piece of shit is history, anyway. And if there's one thing the Losers do best, it's kick history's ass. Dig it up, spit in its face, and bury it again for good.

"Yeah, I know," Richie says, patting Ben's arm.

Ben shakes his head, and the big smile blooms back onto his face. "So."

Richie knows a subject change when he feels one. "So, what?"

"So," Ben says, jerking his chin at the dancing crowd, "what about you guys?"

"What about us guys, what?"

"Getting married, Richie. How many of those drinks have you had tonight?"

Far too many.

Something ratchets Richie's throat closed, and he can't swallow any

more.

The terrace tilts, a miasma of gold and blue, black and silver, the towering ballroom windows casting luxurious puddles of light on the sway of people. A pillow of jazz. Richie's head is so heavy. Gold and blue, Eddie's shining peacock suit open at the collar because Richie can't wear ties, the golden triangle of exposed throat that Richie wants to shelter his face in, later. Forever.

He sets his drink down, and the ice rattles against the shaking glass.

"We, uh. I mean." He picks up his napkin and starts shredding it into messy strips. "His divorce only came through, like, two months ago, I don't — I don't—"

"You never talk about it?" Ben asks, quietly.

"No. Fun fucking conversation that'd be, right?" There's a drift of damp paper on the table, some of it falling through the intricate pattern of gaps. What kind of sociopaths make tables with holes in them? "Hey Eds, y'know how you basically married your shitty mom who fucked you up so bad you need therapy, and you only realized you're even into guys 'cause I was there to save you from the fucking *alien* that tried to kill us, that — that we don't talk about, and 'cause I made you move into my — my fuckin' — *den of iniquity*—"

Ben snorts. "Richie—"

"—but hey, do you wanna get married again immediately after your divorce, like, like this is some kinda Desperate Housewives shit, except gay, and Halle-fuckin-lujah, they only decided it's actually *legal* like six years ago and, and I'm not — I don't know how — if he even *wants to*, or—"

"Richie," Ben says, firmly. "C'mon, man. You're drunk, you know that's all bullshit. I doubt anyone could *make* Eddie move cross country if he didn't want to, not even you."

Richie looks at him, completely sick with himself. Nothing new there. Every last word was bullshit, he knows that, but saying them still feels like a betrayal.

He looks at Ben's kind eyes, narrow and quiet, like confessionals. Architect eyes, seeing Richie right down to his scribble of a blueprint, all his wrong angles and corridors that go nowhere. And he thinks of Derry, and how much of a friend Ben might have been about everything Richie was feeling, if Richie had only told him. One single person, to share the burden. Mutual commiseration over their bottomless wellsprings of love. It's a lot easier to pull your head outta your ass with a little help.

The truth is, Richie was jealous of Ben back then. Of Bill, too, both of them with their knack for creating things, stories and clubhouse sanctuaries, both of them good for getting the fuck out of Derry for even one measly afternoon. All Richie seemed able to do was break shit. His expensive prescription glasses, his first cheap drum kit. His own, searching heart.

But mostly, he was jealous of how Ben loved Beverly. Selfless, and sweet, how a boy likes a girl in a movie. Normal. Nothing at all like Richie's rough hunger, mutated into something hairy and howling at the thought of other boys. He tried so hard to make himself like Bev or Sally Mueller from algebra the way he thought he ought to, but it all chased its tail right back around again to Eddie fucking Kaspbrak.

"C'mon," Ben says again. "What's this really about?"

Richie sweeps the napkin carcass into his empty glass, and props his forehead in his hands. Burning with alcohol. "What if he says no."

He hears a sigh, a susurrus of patience. People always have to be *patient* with him, it's pathetic. Funny how he fell in love with the most antsy person he knows. Eddie's foghorn voice carries over the music, on a frequency Richie tuned his ears to long ago before breaking the dial off.

"The fuck do I do if he says no?"

"He's — he's not gonna say no. And even if he does, that doesn't mean he doesn't love you, or that he won't still want to live with you. Right?"

And that's — Richie never thought of it like that. Someday his all-or-

nothing shit is gonna land him in deep trouble.

He's always been this way. Sober or completely smashed to dripping pieces, like a watermelon dropped from a roof. Center of attention, or left out, ditched and forgotten when people decide they've had enough, and want to be serious. Entirely alone, or loved like he's never been loved before. Truth or dare. It was hard to live in moderation when he always picked dare, to hide from the malformed truth about himself.

It's just, he can't stop *thinking* about it now, about getting married. He invited it willingly into his mind like a vampire over the threshold, thoughts of marrying Eddie sapping at his life-force in a way he never imagined possible throughout all these years of lonely, single *sneering* at strangers for signing their rube lives away to one goddamn person. One part jealousy, one part keeping up an image for the stage. But now that he has his one goddamn person back, he understands. And wonders, when Eddie texts him from the store to ask which kind of Oreos he wants, or when they game on the couch with their legs slotted together like paperclips, and Eddie kicks his controller out of his hands, if it might feel different. If it could *possibly* feel any better than it already does. To be a husband.

What's one more truth? Eddie already knows all his others.

He remembers January, and Eddie's hand in his. *I just need time, Rich.*

Is a year enough time, in the face of twenty-seven? Richie wants another twenty-seven with him, another forty, a thousand, but it'll never be enough.

"Plus, it's you guys." Ben's gentle voice brooks no argument. The certainty of the heterosexual.

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"It means, he sees through your crap. You should've seen the way he was looking at you during your speech, man."

Richie groans into his hands. This is why he shouldn't drink so much. Slugging back champagne and cocktails in an attempt to keep up

with Mike, with Eddie, but it's hopeless. Eddie's fucking chipmunk metabolism means he can hold his liquor high, high above any table he drinks Richie under, even though Richie has six inches and a good thirty pounds on him.

In hindsight, maybe Eddie shouting about taking their shirts off and kissing, back in the Orient, maybe it had nothing at all to do with the shots. Maybe he just saw through Richie's crap.

"Yeah, I guess," he sighs. "I can't hide from him. I don't wanna."

"That's a good thing!" He feels Ben's hand, broad on the back of his neck, grounding through the haze of drink. Weirdly, it reminds him of his dad during Communion. "And you see through his crap too, you always did."

"Only 'cause I was payin' him so much attention."

"That's one way of putting it."

"Screw you, Benny-boy," Richie snorts. He lets his hands fall, and slumps in a knot of folded arms on the table. "I don't mean that. Thanks, man."

"No problem at all. I knew one of us was gonna have to scrape you off the floor tonight, seeing how quick you made friends with the waiter. An open bar isn't a challenge, y'know."

His face is all crumpled and pug-like with amusement, when Richie peeks at him from under his arm. Not a model. Not a Brazilian soccer player. Just one of Richie's best friends.

"Did you guys have like, an agreement?"

"Yep, super official. We wrote it down, it's called the *give Eddie a night off* treaty."

"Ugh, God. He needs one. And listen, uh, can you forget all that shit I said about his mom, and his therapy?"

"It's fine, he told me a while ago." Ben finishes his own drink with a lot more composure. "You're a hopeless romantic, Richie, it's not a



bad thing.”

“Takes one to know one.”

“Damn straight.”

They sit together in comfortable silence, watching. The crowd thins, and Richie can drink in the sight of Eddie and Beverly dancing, feeling more shitfaced than ever.

They're almost of a height, thanks to Bev's heels, which distracts from the fact that Eddie really does have two left feet. Jazz thrums through the metal table under Richie's elbow, bass tremors all up his arm. It's like knocking himself in the noggin with a tuning fork. His forehead feels soft, like he could push the heel of his hand right through and soothe his brain quiet, calm the ache building up at the sight of Eddie tripping over himself and trying again, and again, like he always does.

Bev's hair arcs out red and gold around her glowing face, like solar flares. Richie's glad she has a friend like Eddie, he's glad they have each other, both of them living with the specters of parents who loved them in all the wrong ways, if they loved them at all. Both of them beautiful and patched up scrappy with freckles, under the corona of lights around the terrace. Two of the bravest people Richie knows.

He sighs.

Ben sighs into his own palm too, and Richie snorts at him, shoves at his arm so that he nearly eats table. That's the great thing about Ben; he's too nice to call Richie an asshole.

“Coupla desperate sad sacks we were back then, huh Haystack? Can't really blame us.”

When Ben smiles, it's one of his best, the real guileless kind that has Richie regretting the arm-shoving already. “Not so sad any more, though.”

“Nah,” Richie says, watching Eddie like a blue flame, flickering among the crowd. It's still hard to look at him, sometimes. “Not any

more.”

He has to do it, eventually, he has to. Richie steadies himself on Ben’s shoulder and pushes into the fray.

“No, *I’m* leading,” Bev’s saying, her exasperation growing clearer as Richie wends his way towards them. “Pay attention Eddie, oh my God.”

“When do I get to lead? You said you’d teach me,” Eddie grumbles, and Richie knows that face, that clamped-down eyebrows look of intense concentration. He has to do something or they’ll be here all night, until Eddie masters the waltz or what the fuck ever.

“Hola, my favorite amigos. Let other people have some fun for a change, huh?” Richie grins at Eddie’s startled jump and takes advantage, muscling his way in between them. “Hi Bev.”

“Hi Richie, sweetie,” she says, leaking sarcasm all over the place. Richie’s gonna slip on it in his fancy-ass shoes. “How nice to see you.”

“Yep! It’s always *awesome* to see me.” Her dress is silky under his hands, green like the old quarry’s comforting depths. She’s grinning right back at him, all her sharp teeth showing, and Richie can feel the submerged giggles jumping through her body. “Great night we’re having.”

“Oh yeah, the best. Little too hot for me, though.”

“This is nothing,” Richie scoffs. “You should see L.A., it hasn’t rained for months. How’d you like the meal? I’m gonna have the good old *hot brown snakes* tomorrow, yeesh. I’m not used to fancy.”

“It was delicious. Thanks for being so frank with me.” Bev grins at something over Richie’s shoulder.

“Don’t suppose you’ve got any smokes on ya? For old time’s sake?”

“No, I gave those up a long time ago, and so should you.”

“I have!” His jangling, too-long body is no good for dancing outside

of a mosh pit, so he twirls her like a lasso until she's cussing at him to stop. "That's why I said *old time's sake*, dude."

"Well, I don't have any. And I don't have any weed either, before you ask." Her dangling earrings flash in the low lights as she peers around him again, like it's a middle school dance and they're watched over by the silvery eye of a mirror ball. She's biting her lip, her shoulders shaking.

"Alright, alright. Just thought I'd try scoring. That boyfriend of yours is a douche, by the way. You know he basically called me a drunk?"

"You *are* drunk," Bev says, and then she's cracking up into pieces. "You're such an asshole, Richie! Don't do this to him."

Richie turns, finally, to see Eddie doing his impression of a pillar of salt in the crowd, the shifting flurry of dancing finery surrounding him like a flock of magpies. Hands clenched at his sides. He's glowering like someone just told him they're cancelling *How It's Made* on the Discovery Channel.

Richie's heart thumps loud in his ears. His grip around Bev's waist loosens, without him thinking about it. "'Sup, Eds! Didn't see ya there."

"Asshole," Eddie enunciates, very clearly. He folds his arms so tight it looks like he'll burst the seams of his suit. Not Richie's fault it fits him like a fucking glove. Or that Eddie likes doing push-ups so much.

He's got this *vein* on his bicep...

"This is painful to watch," Bev sighs, and she shoves Richie forward, hard enough that Eddie has to quickly unfold his arms to catch him, just so they don't end up in a heap. "I warmed him up for you, Richie."

"No you didn't — shut up, Beverly," Eddie hisses, but she's already spinning away into Ben's arms.

It's awkward for the tiniest moment, before their bodies take over. There's something about being near to him, it's like all of Richie's electrons have to up stakes and twine each atomic little orbit into

Eddie's, just to balance out the universe. It's physics. Richie got an A in physics in high school, he knows this shit.

He slides his arm around Eddie's shoulders, taking his other hand gently. "Hey, baby."

Eddie only glances around them once before his palm slips under Richie's jacket, settling warm on his waist. Nobody sneers. Nobody comes over, and tells them to leave. "Hey."

"You wanna dance? I don't have cooties, I promise."

They might be swaying, or maybe it's the world that's swaying around them. The inside of Richie's head is an endless tumbling curl, like wave after tubular Californian wave.

Eddie's twitching a small smile down at Richie's undone top buttons. "Gimme cooties, see if I care. I think I've caught every disease you've got by now."

"Mm, yeah." He leans in, 'til the peachy fuzz on the shell of Eddie's ear kisses against his lip. "Like Tozieritis."

He feels Eddie's breath of a laugh, more than he hears it. The crowd drains away a little more around them, tired people moving back indoors, leaving, separating. Suddenly Richie doesn't ever want this to end, Eddie pressed close enough that their belt buckles clink, and his breath stirring Richie's hair the way the stagnant Georgia air never will.

"You look nice," Eddie mumbles. His furtive once-over feels like hands roaming up Richie's body.

Richie preens, and wobbles them around in a small circle. His own suit is the slate gray of Chicago in a rainstorm, a sight he can barely remember. He'd pushed his sleeves up to his elbows sometime between dessert and his third trip to the bar, so hopefully Eddie knows where his cufflinks are, at least.

He shimmies a little, to make Eddie laugh again. "Miami Vice, baby!"

"I — what?"

“My *sleeves*. You were right, shit peaked in the eighties.”

Something’s ticklish. The foggy delay in his head catches up, and he realizes it’s Eddie’s hand, clenching open and closed on his hip.

“I’m taking that back,” Eddie says with a grin. “This decade has a lot of shit going for it. This year, anyway.”

This must be how dogs feel when they stick their heads outta car windows. Ecstatic, and buffeted by the constant stream of sweet sensation. Richie basks in Eddie’s roundabout brand of affection, feeling the slow tide of their breathing press their stomachs together in synch.

“Amen, dude. I don’t look as nice as *you*, though, Ah say, Ah say, *Lawd* Ah do declare. Me ‘n’ a couple dozen debutantes agree.”

Eddie coughs, and ducks his head. Even in the decadent waterfall of shadow from the hotel, Richie can see his ears blushing.

“Fucking embarrassing. Nobody’s looked at me twice for years, and now — it’s the suit, I’m not—”

“It is *not* the suit,” Richie teases. “You’re a panty-soaker, babe, just accept it.”

“Shut up!” Eddie’s huddled low enough that his head is nearly on Richie’s chest.

“You’re the hottest person here. You coulda danced with any one of ‘em.”

Eddie’s skin is just as hot as his ears look, when Richie tips his face back up to press their sweaty foreheads together. It’s almost as warm as home, dark and intimate, Richie’s whole world narrowed down to these eyes, dark like charcoal in the pit of a fire, still hot to the touch. Looking at him like he’s full of shit and Eddie’s happy to listen. They could be in their bed, if it weren’t for being fully dressed.

“I didn’t wanna dance with any of them, though,” Eddie says, softly.

Richie tugs him even closer. Their noses brush, and this kind of

dancing is easy. It's more like hugging in rhythm. He closes his eyes for longer every time he blinks, because the way Eddie's still holding his gaze is gonna make Richie do something stupid.

"It, uh — that seemed like a pretty intense talk you were having with Ben," Eddie mutters after a minute or so. He looks almost nervous, which isn't allowed. Not right now. Richie rubs his thumb in circles around one of Eddie's knuckles. "You looked... are you okay? Did he — what did he say?"

Richie's the one who should be nervous. He can barely hide dehydration headaches from Eddie, let alone the biggest fucking question he could possibly ask the guy.

Is it, though? Maybe he already asked it, back in Derry. Maybe this whole year has been one long, hot, wonderful answer.

He'll think about it tomorrow, or next week. Whenever the lights stop spinning. They're nice, even though they're disorienting. Eddie's warmly alive in his arms, so he could never confuse this with the Deadlights in a million years. The jazz band are packing their instruments into odd-shaped coffins, putting their boring music to sleep, but someone, somewhere, is playing eighties ballads over a sound system. The universal sign of an evening ending and becoming a night.

Richie lets the alcohol loosen him even further. Their thighs are touching. Eddie steps on his foot.

"Rich," Eddie presses. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he sighs. "I just drank — drank too much. Haystack was only being a swell guy, moppin' me up. Swell fella, a — a swella. Hah!"

Eddie snorts, and leans back to squint at him. Shoots him the ole stink-eye, though it's not all that stinky. "You're fucking hammered."

"Yes, I am."

"I knew you would be. An open bar—"

“Isn’t a challenge, I know, I know. You stole that from Ben.”

“No. You can drink whatever you want, I have Tylenol upstairs. I was gonna say it’s a liability. I bet you a hundred bucks there are gators out on that golf course.”

They look out into the dark. The terrace floats like a shining island in ink. They could be in Antarctica at night, or on the moon, icy white marble and blackness beyond them, alone and infinite. But those places are cold, and Richie is decidedly not cold. Neither is he alone, with his friends paired off around him and Eddie’s blazing, familiar skin only two thin shirts and a vest away from his own. It’s hot in that magic swamp way, hot enough for bubbly fermentation, for growing oranges that burst sharp on his tongue like sex with Eddie, and the risen moon is the blue-white afterburn of a rocket’s initial sunburst launch.

Richie clings to Eddie’s shoulder, and looks away from the outside world. “You’d save me from the gators, Eds?”

Eddie’s eyes are so soft. “I’d save the gators from you, dumbass.”

“Thank you.” His words slur into kisses, pressed to the dip of Eddie’s temple, his scar, growing bolder the more Eddie just *lets* him, still in sight of strangers, and their friends. “Thank you, thank you—”

“What — what for?” Eddie’s squirming, ducking against his own shoulder to escape Richie’s assault. His fingers tighten in Richie’s shirt.

“For the gators.” *For the Tylenol. For the drool. For coming to California, for everything.* “For dancing with me.”

“We’re doing a shitty job, you’re even worse than I am.”

“That’s just ‘cus I’m drunk, man.”

“Nah, I’ve seen you dance at home. You’re like those balloon guys they use to sell cars.”

“I never had any practice!” He pulls at Eddie’s hand, trying to spin him, or dip him, or something, but it’s a lot harder to do when he’s

not leading. “C’mon, remember middle school? This is even the same fucking song!”

Eddie’s got that concentrating look again, but it’s probably because he’s doing most of the work of keeping them upright. “What the fuck are you talking about, you — you goddamn *tree*, stand up—”

“Middle school, Halloween, the — the dance.”

Indigo darkness, just like this, like the inside of a crystal ball. Synths echoing with kickdrum reverb, like hearing music from the bottom of a glittery canyon. The same kind they’re playing now, cracking his heart open like a nostalgic egg. Staring at Eddie in the corner. Sweeping strings feeding him images of vampires, and claws, and how all the horror is *nothing* in the face of love. The walls of the school gym studded with mirror ball reflections, as Richie hauled Eddie away from Stanley and Bill and the snack table, behind the bleachers for some so-called *practice*.

“I wanted to hold your hand,” Richie whispers. “You were — you went as Rambo, remember?”

“Oh fuck, yeah. I do.” The light from the hotel windows hits them just right, and he can see Eddie flushing pink, clashing horribly with his suit. “You took one of your dad’s ties, and—”

“Tied it—”

“—around my head, yeah, that’s right.” Eddie laughs. “And you were a fucking toilet paper mummy. The least amount of effort you could put into a costume, aside from, like... sticking a sheet over your head. So dumb.”

Richie remembers. A litany of extremely creative *your mummy* jokes. The dense fog of collective eighth grader B.O., the colored lights falling in strips like Saturn’s rings on Eddie’s apprehensive face and twisting hands, through the bleachers above them. Standing in front of one another. Not moving.

Richie’s heart, pounding frantic enough that he was so, so fucking scared Eddie could hear it.



*Just to practice, Eds, so — so we know how to dance with girls.*

“I pretended — I pretended I couldn’t tie it,” Eddie mumbles. He tucks his face in Richie’s neck, now, and Richie wants a time machine. Wants to go back and shove them together, under the bleachers where no one could realistically see, but it felt like the whole world was watching. They could’ve had this, back then.

His shirt buttons catch against Eddie’s, and his heart could be loud as a thunderclap for all he cares. “Why?”

“So you’d tie it for me.” Eddie’s lips brush his throat. The people around them will just see a couple slow-dancing, Richie realizes with a heady jolt. *We’re not in eighth grade any more, Toto.*

There’s no point in wishing for a different past. It happened, and maybe it had to happen the way that it did or Richie wouldn’t have what he has now; Eddie’s hand hot like a flat iron in the small of his back, and more stars overhead than Richie’s seen in months. Nostalgia is a bittersweet rot he’s addicted to, but it has absolutely fucking nothing on the present.

He’s gotta cut himself loose from Derry sometime. He’s gonna miss all the good shit.

“That’s so cute, Eds,” he coos. “Crafty.”

“Yeah.” Eddie sounds as embarrassed as always at his past self for daring to have feelings. He’s hiding from it, his hair crow-feather glossy in the moonlight, all Richie can see of him from the corner of his eye. “I — Jesus, I wanted to kiss you. Under the bleachers, remember? I thought I was gonna have an asthma attack, but we just stood there.”

Richie feels his face split into the stupidest smile. He catches Beverly’s eye over Eddie’s shoulder, and she winks at him from where she’s wrapped around Ben. “No fuckin’ way you wanted to kiss me in middle school! I had beaver teeth, and my breath stank like cigarettes and dick cheese.”

Eddie leans out of his collar, his face all screwed up like he’s gonna

gag. “Dick cheese?”

“Yeah, from trying to suck my own—”

“Fucking — ew, Richie! I really hate you sometimes, we were having a moment.”

“Shh, we can get it back, c’mon.” He grins at Eddie trying to stay grumpy, and leans on his shoulder to pull his glasses off. “You could kiss me now. Set things straight, or — not straight, but you know what I—”

“Alright,” Eddie cuts in. “I will.”

“Oh.” His tunnel vision for Eddie is worse with his glasses off, but he can still see the shapes of other people, blurred like they’re on the other side of a steamy winter window. “Uh — okay.”

They’ve never — not in public.

Richie stares transfixed at the confusingly hot lines on Eddie’s face, his favorites, the ones that walk a tightrope from his cheekbones to the sharp, stubborn jut of his flexing jaw. Gearing up like a pitcher in the ninth.

The music swells. Something about cleaning a soul.

“Alright,” Eddie says again, softer, and then he *does*.

He lets go of Richie’s hand, to slide his own up the shirt placket struggling vainly to keep Richie decent. Reactions dulled by alcohol, Richie doesn’t close his eyes right away, fucking enchanted by Eddie pushing in close with his hair falling into his face, up on his toes. His heart goes nuts, and Eddie must be able to feel it through his own chest, or through Richie’s back where he’s pushing his hands up under Richie’s jacket.

They’ve only been kissing for six months. Eddie’s lips close gently around his, and it still feels like the diamond split of a lightning strike, or the time Richie electrocuted himself when he was working as a roadie.

Like blades down his spine. Jackknifing his hips forward.

He whimpers, stroking one finger up the back of Eddie's neck. The soft, vulnerable hollow of his nape. Eddie's nose snubs into his cheek as he tilts in deeper, leaning all his weight on Richie, still wobbling on his toes. He's so fucking warm and courageous, licking into Richie's mouth with the party draped humming around them like a beehive on a summer's day, tasting like the mango thing he had for dessert. His tongue dips into the place between Richie's teeth and lower lip, where it's crowded with blood-vessels. He kisses Richie's philtrum. Flirts his hands dangerously close to the seat of Richie's pants.

Their legs tangle up.

The music's distant, echoing through Richie's memory from middle school on Halloween, when he couldn't dare put his hand to Eddie's cheek and feel his jaw moving in the rhythm of slow morning sex. Richie pours everything into kissing him back. Grabs handfuls of his suit, thinks syrupy-slow thoughts of grabbing the mane of a mustang and holding on for dear life. Carried into the sunset. He sucks slowly on Eddie's tongue, kisses him harder. Eddie's body fits firm and compact in the circle of his arms, and he sighs a quiet moan when Richie pushes his hand down flat to the spade of his tailbone, and then someone's whistling.

It's piercing, right through the shivery mulch of Richie's head. Eddie's mouth slips from the cradle of his own lips, wet and parted.

"Get a room!" Bev hollers.

Richie fumbles his glasses out of his pocket. Narrowly avoids poking himself in the eye, which would be a real ironic way to go blind.

"Yeah," Mike says, on their left, looking like royalty in his own tux and swaying a respectable distance from Patricia Uris, who's smiling behind her hand. "Preferably one far away from mine."

He feels a groan rumble against his throat, and pets shaky fingers into Eddie's hair. All the lights, the drinks, the *kiss*, he can't—

Bill's grinning with Audra like the indulgent big brother he still is, in a way, to them all. Still doesn't do a damn thing about the teasing.

Neither does Ben, though he has the decency to at least *try*. "C'mon guys, leave them alone."

Richie swallows, and prays Eddie doesn't bolt. He's breathing panic-fast in Richie's arms, more humid than even the dewy golf course air, and his blue suit is rumpled from Richie's hands into silky furrows, like a choppy Caribbean sea.

If Eddie's embarrassed, Richie's never gonna forgive himself.

Then Eddie looks up at him, kissed-sloppy, dimpled and stunning. He tears a grin into his road-rage face and whirls around like a tornado, one hand still fisted in Richie's shirt.

"All of you chucklefucks, leave us alone!"

There's a small clearing around them on the terrace. *Eddie's blast radius*, Richie thinks dumbly, feeling him fizz in his arms like a bottle-rocket. *The horny dumbass zone*.

"You hear me?" Eddie blares. "Piss off! I love him, and if we wanna kiss we're gonna fucking kiss! You guys get to!"

"Not like *that*," Bill mutters. He shrugs at his wife apologetically when she raises her eyebrows at him.

"Deal with it, assholes!"

"No!" Mike laughs. "If I have to ruin the mood so I don't hear you getting busy through the wall, I will!"

"Hoo sheeit!" Eddie cracks back like a whip, in — in one of the Voices, what the *fuck*. "Sounds like somebody's forgotten what it's like to get laid, *Micycle*."

A belly laugh slams out of Richie so hard he staggers sideways, dragging Eddie with him. "Man alive, Eds gets off a good one! Put 'er there, babe!"

Eddie smacks a fierce high-five into Richie's waiting hand, and *Christ*, he loves the little firecracker so goddamn much. Getting Eddie to forget himself and lose his shit is Richie's life's work, and it always feels better than any applause or Emmy buzz ever could. Who knew it would feel a thousand times better when they're on the same *side*. Mike grins and shakes his head at them, sweeping an amused Patty nobly away from the ruckus.

Bill raises his voice over the music, and the sound of Beverly's shrieking laughter. "How the hell is your house still standing, Richie?"

Before Richie can say anything, Eddie rounds on Bill next, still wild-eyed and sparking. Pointing his finger like he's some old-timey moron in a swordfight. "Hey! It's my house too, it's our house!"

"Yeah, it's his house too!"

"I planted all the fuckin' flowerbeds!"

"And they look rad! Fuck you, Bill!"

"God, you're both the *worst*, I forgot how loud you guys are in person!" Beverly shouts. Ben looks thoroughly mortified, nodding to the few terrified remaining strangers still out here with them. Eddie wraps himself around Richie's middle and they waver around, cackling and holding each other up, and it's just like being back in the clubhouse; half-mad and surrounded by the people who love him. "You deserve each other."

"Fuck yeah, we do," Eddie wheezes. "Right, Rich?"

"*Fuck* yeah, Spaghetti Man, you tell 'em!"

"Remind me to soundproof the guest bedroom before you visit at Christmas," Audra pipes up, smiling bemusedly out from behind where Bill's trying to shield her from Loser bullshit. "This is pure chaos."

"Believe it or not, they were worse as kids," Bill replies, turning back to her. "At least now they've stopped pretending they don't like each other."

Boy howdy, have they ever.

Eddie's calming down, though he hasn't let go of Richie's hips. Music from their childhood echoes from the open hotel doors, and it's considered old now, but Richie doesn't feel old, not like this. Cocooned by his best friends. It was always an act, the bickering. Sure, Richie ran his mouth like a garbage truck and dumped it over Eddie more than any of the others, just to make him pay attention, but he never pretended not to *like* him. Liking him was the whole point. And he can't speak for Eddie, who often did get worked up enough that he looked like he'd burst into tears, but it never felt anywhere close to *dislike* whenever he saved Richie an ice cream, or dutifully built all Richie's wild ideas out of Lego. When you're eleven years old it's hard to know the difference between a boy's love or his annoyance, just so long as he's looking at you.

He cups Eddie's ridiculous face. "You're a crazy sumbitch, y'know that?"

Eddie's giddy little bursts of noise are subsiding. "Your fault," he says, under his breath, and presses a lingering kiss to Richie's cheek.

Richie's last drink crashes in through all the gaps created by staggering around, seeps into the spongy highways of his brain and frays his thoughts apart. He dangles himself over Eddie's shoulders like clothes on a hanger, tucking his face into the campfire smell of his neck.

"Hey, Eds," he murmurs.

He's too tall for this. His spine is weeping from hunching down like a church gargoyle, but Eddie's arms would go all numb if he had to put them up around Richie's neck. And that's bullshit.

"Hm?"

"Am I the girl?"

"...What?"

"This, this," he slurs, hugging Eddie closer. "In dancing, the girl holds the guy's — his shoulders, an' he holds her, her... uh..."

“Her waist?”

“Yeah, ‘cus that’s the most erotic — erogenous zones.”

“Is that so,” Eddie snorts, quietly. His thumbs move against Richie’s ribs in little wiper-blade arcs, and it feels so nice. “Neither of us is the girl, Richie.”

“You’re pullin’ my pecker here, man.”

“I’m not. You’re my — my guy, that’s kinda the point.”

The point. He’s Eddie’s, and that’s the whole goddamn point. “That makes more sense.”

“You’re definitely not the girl. Didn’t you *just* shave before we got dressed? My mouth hurts now, asshole, you’re all prickly again.”

Richie hums happily, rubbing his face in the hollow behind Eddie’s ear. “I’m too much man for ya, Eds.”

He feels Eddie smiling against his throat. “You’re a fuckin’ Sasquatch, maybe.”

They sway for a while, silent, left in peace. Eddie strokes his waist. His back. Richie closes his eyes against everything else but this, and it’s one of the happiest moments of his life, which is fucked up, given why they’re even here in Georgia in the first place. But then, he’s never had a good grip on priorities.

He doesn’t believe in ghosts, but maybe he should. Look at everything belief has brought them. Dead old monsters, new lives, Richie’s friends in close orbit around him under the fish-scale moon like a séance, conjuring up some smoke-after-fire impression of Stanley happily bullshitting right alongside them, just like always. Manifested through love. And Richie hopes it might always feel like this when they’re all together, that he might get to dance and feel like this again sometime soon, if Eddie only says yes.

He rolls his forehead against Eddie’s shoulder, slumping against him. Mouths a silent trio of words to his blood-warm throat.

“Eds...”

He doesn't know if Eddie kisses his ear, or if he's just whispering so close that it feels like it. Still makes his breastbone hurt, either way. “Yeah, Rich?”

“Y'think... y'think Stan woulda liked this, t'night?”

Eddie sighs shakily, and holds him tighter. “Uh... I don't... I don't know. Maybe he was different as an adult. He never liked making a big deal about stuff, remember?”

“Yeah. Bar — Barb — Mitzvah from hell. They didn't even slice his dick off.”

“Uh huh. I know you were disappointed. But I think... yeah, I think he would've liked us all bein' here for him.”

“That's good,” Richie sighs. Eddie always knows what to say. “That's good.”

He doesn't remember much after that, only burnt-celluloid impressions of herding back indoors, of corralling the waiter, of downing half another White Russian before Eddie snatches the glass to finish it off. Mike's lily-petal pocket square growing rubies as he mops up the nosebleed that Bill reassures them is normal this late, and the corridor tilting like a galleon as Eddie unlocks their door, puffing unsteadily under Richie's weight.

“Fuck, you're heavy,” he groans, depositing Richie on the bed.

The golf course sprinklers sound like the wind in marshy Maine reeds. Richie's letting the bed eat him. He stretches his tired feet out, when Eddie unlaces his fancy dress shoes for him and pulls them off. His jacket is gone, and then so are his pants, and Eddie's pulling the cool sheet up over them. It feels like slipping into the quarry, away from everything.

“Not jus' a one time deal, huh Eds...”

“What's not?” Eddie's breath smells like mint. He must've brushed his teeth, at three-thirty in the morning. So adorable.



“My shoes... on Valentine’s.”

“Oh damn, you remember that,” Eddie laughs. He presses in behind Richie, curving them together like two commas. Cups a firm hand to Richie’s belly, under his creased shirt.

“Course I do... wouldn’t f’rget our first... first date.” His eyelids sink, and the Earth’s rotation is lulling, womb-like in the dark.

“That was like, our hundredth date, Rich.” Eddie’s voice blesses quietly into his shoulder. “It was never a one time deal.”

And Richie falls in love again, or maybe just unconscious.

Sympathy is thin on the fucking ground in the morning.

He wears sunglasses to breakfast, because even the fancy silver toast-holder things are trying to stab at his eyes. The rest of the trip is better, though, roaming in a group to cool themselves off in the spray of the Olympic Park fountains, as the angry, deep south sun drips slow down their necks, like yellow oil.

Patricia invites them to her house and shows them the preserved footprints of Stan’s life. Eddie goes with Mike and Ben to see some movie nobody else cares about, and Richie spends the afternoon watching videos on Beverly’s phone of her pets, giving them Voices and making her laugh. They bar-hop at night to find some karaoke, and Richie yowls his lungs dry to Whitney Houston, pointing right at where Eddie’s still grinning hugely even as he’s hiding behind Bill, because Eddie’s always full of shit, just like he was full of shit about the hotel bed sex embargo.

He lets Richie kneel on the plush carpet to suck his cock, his noises muffled by the running shower and Richie’s fingers stuffed into his mouth. And when Eddie returns the favor, Richie makes sure to be extra loud, just to make up for it.

Mike looks pained at dinner, Eddie looks resigned, and Richie looks around the table feeling like he actually deserves to be a little smug, for once.

Eddie loses money to Ben and Audra when they all play the world's most riotous game of poker, and Richie wins it back for him. When the time comes to leave, it's a red-eye flight, but Eddie only shakes out his National Geographic and hands Richie his own dorky neck pillow, and Richie drools on him this time, the whole way home.

### Notes for the Chapter:

the song they're kissing to is of course, [the power of love](#), by frankie goes to hollywood. i've had a headcanon about their middle school dance since the first movie, and then ch2 came out, and well... the first words of the fucking song are "i'll protect you from the hooded claw" ffs

genuinely DID NOT REALISE this chapter was 10k until right now. as such, i'm giving myself another week to finish the last chapter which might actually be getting split into two again because the word count is ever-spiraling. sorry these updates are getting further and further apart, i didn't mean for it to happen this way woops! i'm a slow writer, but it's almost there ;0; [@skinks](#)

## 14. Chapter 14

### Notes for the Chapter:

yes the chapter count has gone up again. im so sorry

October arrives with its fists raised, putting up a valiant fight against the heatwave and coming pretty damn close to winning.

Richie remembers Octobers in Maine, and how the fall colors seemed to flame through town overnight like nature was committing arson. How the cold snap would come like a mysterious stranger with a black hat that snuffed out the sun by six PM, all anyone could talk about, as if it didn't happen like clockwork every year.

*Ayuh, gonna be a real biter by Thanksgiving.*

*That's what the weatherman from Portland says, sure.*

Richie hated it. Fall meant school sucking at their heels like mud, meant he couldn't spend all day goofing off like he wanted. The harvest would steal Mike away for weeks at a time, and Bill always turned pale and silent until Halloween was over, like he was trying to let his parents forget they'd ever had any children at all.

Plus, Eddie would stop wearing shorts. This was a secret, selfish reason on Richie's part for hating the season, but it felt just as much a betrayal as hearing the way the cold would have Eddie's lungs sounding like the bowels of a shipwreck, hollow and wet.

It's October in L.A., and they're surviving the heatwave. It's still *hot*, but it's a beautiful, comfortable embrace of a day.

Eddie's still wearing his shorts, and Richie knows his lungs are strong enough for a marathon. For fucking *anything*.

"I'm gonna hurl," Eddie groans, bouncing up and down in place on his toes.

"Do it on one of these other douchebags." Richie nods at the brightly colored herd of runners trapped in their giant holding pen alongside

Eddie, waiting to be called to the starting line. “Get an early advantage. It’s all about tactics, Eds.”

Eddie’s rictus grin looks like it hurts his face, like it’s stapled on. His bouncing is sending little ripples up his toned thighs. It’s also making Richie dizzy, so he leans over the waist-high metal barrier and grabs at his tank top, tugging him to a halt. The fabric layers wet like folds of icing in the small of Eddie’s back, already damp from warm-ups and the way the sun is turning the Dodgers’ stadium parking lot to an asphalt frying pan.

The heatwave’s dying, but they do still live in Southern California. At least Richie’s tongue doesn’t feel like a slab of thick, cooked meat in his mouth any more.

“I’m gonna hurl if you keep jumping around like that.” He watches Eddie twisting his hands over and over, like he’s a card shark dealing tricks. “You were fine in the car, why are you so nervous? You run all the time.”

“But this is a *competition*,” Eddie hisses, leaning hard against the barrier like he’s gonna start clambering over.

Richie tries squeezing his bony hip, to soothe him. It’s technically a charity event, but this is Eddie he’s talking to. “Ah, right. I shoulda known.”

“What if — what if I fall on my face or — or shit myself? That can happen y’know, there’s less blood flow to your intestines and the motion kinda moves all your organs around, it happened — fuck, it happened to Paula Radcliffe, and—”

“I don’t know who that is, babe,” Richie shrugs.

This will all pass as soon as the whistle blows and Eddie has to actually concentrate, Richie’s sure of it. He was like this the first time they were entrusted with Oliver’s afternoon walkies, too, but look at them now! He hasn’t even been hit by a car yet, Richie would count that as a success worthy of a parade. At least a big balloon or two.

Eddie’s gonna put dents in the fence, and Richie can see way too

much of the whites of his eyes. It's weird. "She shit herself during a marathon, Richie!"

"Okay—"

"In the street!"

"Jesus, okay!" He looks down helplessly at the handfuls of stuff he's carrying for Eddie; his water, his towel, wallet, keys. He left his inhaler very deliberately on the kitchen counter, at home. "In that case I'll, uh... I'll shield you from view? That's a sacred moment, dude, I'm the only one allowed to see you drop a deuce."

The times his dumbassery actually works its magic are worth all the other times it doesn't. Eddie stops short in the middle of his anxious contortions and splutters into disgusted laughter, so loud a couple other runners turn their heads.

"That's so fucking gross," Eddie snorts. He puffs his cheeks and blows upwards, ruffling his hair. Richie was kinda hoping he'd wear a sweatband, really complete the whole look, but he isn't. A guy can dream. "You will never see me take a shit."

"I've seen you do pretty much everything else."

"Stop it. How would you even get there in time?"

"I'd run, obviously."

"I'd pay good fuckin' money to see that."

"Then get ready to cough up, sweetcheeks." Richie sticks his chest out, and pokes Eddie's a few times. "I'm *support crew*. I'm like your roadie."

His mouth goes a little dry, watching as Eddie leans slowly into his space. Now that Eddie's so much better with public affection, it's actually getting *harder* to resist constantly feeling him up. Especially when his eyes are all astronomic heat and light, burning into Richie's.

Eddie murmurs, "You think you can keep up with me?"

Richie's thumb brushes Eddie's hand as he mirrors the casual lean. He can count every one of Eddie's freckles, this close. "You *want* me to keep up?"

Two of Eddie's fingers skate along the underside of his wrist, where Richie can feel his own pulse. He's still not breaking eye contact. "That's not what I asked."

Richie cocks his head, grinning like a fool. Eddie fucking *winks*. Even when the summer ends completely, Richie will still run hot enough to power the entire city, warmed through to the core every single day by this; Eddie dimpling at him, and forgetting to worry about things long enough to play with him in his bullshit.

"I've kept up this long, haven't I?"

"Yeah, you're a real pest," Eddie says, breaking the moment. He's breathing easier now, and he doesn't look so pond-scum green. "Thanks, Rich."

"No problemo," Richie sighs. One of these days he's gonna turn *Eddie* on in public, see how he likes it. "Wait, what for?"

"For shielding me when I shit in the street."

"Oh yeah. Anytime, baby. Someone's gotta have dignity in this relationship, and I'd really hate for it to be me."

The parking lot is as vast as an airport runway and twice as loud. Richie feels severely doughy and out of place here, in the shadow of a baseball castle. An unfit squire amongst knights. Ah, fuck it, none of these people probably ever killed an alien before, why should he feel bad? He's earned his fucking rest, thanks. It's packed with spectators and competitors alike, milling around like gym rats in a heavily-advertised maze, waiting for the next demanding airhorn. Sunlight glints off the safety pin holding Eddie's race number to his shirt, and Richie fiddles with it, just for an excuse to touch him.

"You're not gonna be bored, are you?" Eddie asks quietly, leaning even further over the barrier.

The paper crumples against his washboard stomach, under Richie's

hand. He's been training like crazy for this all summer. Number one-oh-nine. Richie should've got a shirt printed, made a sign or something, that's the sorta stuff a supportive fiancé would've done. He can do it. He *will* do it, as soon as he finds the right moment to ask. Just fucking *watch him*.

Eddie straightens his hat for him, tugging so it's not as low over Richie's face. It's the I HATE NYC one from the Fourth of July, the one Eddie saw and thought of him, from an entire continent away.

As if Richie could ever get bored of this.

"Nah," he says, butting his head into Eddie's palm. "I'm gonna livestream it to Instagram. Commentate, y'know, give the outsider *pee oh vee*."

"Oh yeah?" Eddie flicks the brim of his cap. "How's that go, I wanna hear it."

Never let it be said that Richie Tozier backs down from a challenge. He waves an obliging hand in a mock bow, then mimes a mic, stretching out his jaw for the rubber-band twang of his Announcer Voice.

"Al-*righty*, here we are ladies and gents, Bens and Jerrys, it's another be-yootiful ass-swamper of a day for a marathon here in Los Angeles, and I'm *on site* and undercover with the live report. There's more leg out here than a strip-club-chicken-joint combo, it's like a Hustlers met a KFC and nine months later the baby exploded, it is *messy* and I am *in-to it*, yessiree. Call in *now* to RTEK six-nine-four-twenty FM with your best joke about runners' diarrhea and you, yes *you* stand a chance of winning a piece of equipment you'll spend all Thanksgiving trying to convince your family it isn't a sex toy! Can we say that on air? Anyway, the sun is high, the day is dry, and it's time for Trashmouth Tozier's Top Tips, tip top of the *morning* to ya folks, I'll tell ya; I don't know shit about running but I'm standing here with my dick stuck in a vending machine, which is a real easy way to stick it to the Man if you don't got a lotta time or resources, so—"

"This is — this is the worst race commentary I ever heard," Eddie hoots. He's laughing in the nutty, full-body way he does sometimes,

tongue peeking between his teeth and hunched over, slapping at Richie. “Who’s *winning*, dummy?”

“Oh shit, yeah.” Richie grins and adjusts the peak of his cap, peering into the distance. “Here he comes, is that—? Yep, it’s sexy Forrest Gump, it’s Speedy Kaspbrak Gonzales himself, and he’s *torching* it folks, anyone would think that man was promised a BJ later—”

Eddie shushes him, still creased up and shaking with laughter. He claps a hand over Richie’s mouth, jerking away again when Richie noisily licks it, tasting salt and the chemical scrape of antibac wipes.

“It was a stupid question,” Eddie giggles. He wipes his hand on Richie’s shirt. “You still don’t know how to be bored.”

“Yeah, it’s like I got Looney Tunes on repeat up here.” Richie pushes his glasses up his nose, and taps his own forehead. “I’ll be fine, man. You just do what you gotta do, I’ll be there at the, uh. End place.”

“The finish line.”

“That’s the one. You oughta go on Jeopardy, Eds.”

Eddie’s tracing the chain of Richie’s knuckles where he’s gripping the fence, gazing up at him, all squinting and shiny in the sun with his smile a sickle cutting teeth into his lower lip. Sweat glitters like frost in his temples, and Richie sighs. It’s a summer frost, like the rim of an ice-cold drink, a cool spot of relief in Richie’s whole life. Making it all bearable. His heart’s probably glowing in his goddamn chest like a Care Bear, he’s so proud; the race hasn’t even started, but that’s just how it is.

He blows gently on Eddie’s face, to cool him down.

“God, c’mere,” Eddie says suddenly, and then he’s stepping on the lowest rung of the barrier to get on Richie’s level, kissing him firm and sweet.

Richie quickly drops the bag of Eddie’s stuff to hold him steady. It’s brief, no tongue, and Eddie’s hands are gone from his face almost as soon as they’re cradling it, but it still knocks Richie windless. He braces their weight while it lasts, fits his hands in the tight shelves of



Eddie's obliques and marvels, for the millionth time, how such a rawhide strip of a body can hold so much *person*. His stomach feels hooked out through his navel, all his bloody-soft and undefended parts exposed by broad daylight to the crowd, and that's exactly it. He doesn't need the crowd's approval any more. This is why Richie wants to marry him. He wants a concrete declaration to the world that tried to make him forget the man he loves, a bellowing, inked-down shout of *this is Eddie Kaspbrak, he beat you at your own game, and you'll never take me from him again*.

And if Eddie says no, then Richie will deal with it. Because Ben was right. It doesn't change this; trading smiles between their lips like notes passed secretly in class, in a way Richie never could have done publicly a year ago. He thinks that maybe he forgot to grow up after leaving Derry the first time, and it's all come speeding along at once over the course of nearly thirteen months, like a videotape stuck on fast-forward. Brought on by the soul-splitting need to be someone Eddie could picture building a life with.

Seems like it's working so far. This whole *mature* thing ain't so bad.

Eddie steps off the rung, grinning down at his most trusted pair of sneakers. His ears are luminous pink, lit up from within by his bright blood.

Richie whistles lowly and stoops to gather the bag he dropped. He licks at his lip, tasting Eddie, and electrolytes. "That was for good luck, I'm guessing?"

"Something like that," Eddie smirks.

"I hope it works, you really are gonna fall on your face with your laces like that," Richie tuts. "Very sloppy, Kaspbrak."

"Ah, shit." Eddie bends over hurriedly to avert disaster. It's a good thing he's quitting his job, Richie's certain his risk analysis skills have taken a real hit these past few months.

"Get 'em tied, maggot!" Richie barks.

"Fuck off, I'm doing it!"

He snickers, enjoying the view. Eddie's looking fucking delectable today, but maybe it's just the contrast of seeing him in his running stuff around thousands of other people, where Richie can't maul him. Warmed up, caramelized limbs. Juicy little biceps, like segments of a mandarin. He's in black shorts instead of his red ones, equally tiny, with the skin-tight compression thingies on underneath to prevent sweat rash — so Richie has been lectured. They're still hot, painted onto his springcoil thighs like that. The red ones have the built-in mesh underwear bit that drives Richie *crazy*, the ones Eddie was wearing the day he came home to find Richie pantsless in the middle of the living room, IKEA parts spread around him like a dissected frog in science class. It's a fond memory, the savage flex of Eddie's jaw as his keys jangled abruptly to the floor. Richie had been inventing swear words, his hair scraped back into the tiniest ponytail known to man, and soon enough he was fucking Eddie over the back of the couch with just the leg of the shorts pulled aside, and now Eddie feels weird about wearing them in public.

Richie pulls at his collar, letting some air in.

The ground vibrates with the music heaving over the parking lot from the stadium's sound system. There's the strange prickling itch on the back of his neck that tells him he's being watched. He's used to it, he has some freaky static-electricity sixth sense for when people aren't gonna pass him in the street without quoting a line at him, but a tiny ulcer of nerves still corrodes open in his belly all the same. They *were* just kissing.

No, he thinks immediately, *fuck that*. They're allowed, and Richie's ready to throw punches over it.

He takes covert stock of himself, just to make sure he hasn't accidentally popped a boner in public again, or something. That usually makes people stare.

Eddie's still tying and re-tying his laces. Five minutes 'til go-time, the announcement booms from the very sky, like God itself. Richie peers around for the source of the eyes sunk into him like an oyster fork, pulling him vulnerable from his shell of anonymity, and—

It's—

Oh, *shit*. Of all the fucking *odds*.

Behind Eddie, just a few scant yards away in the crush of runners. It's the assistant from the jewelry store, the one who had finally managed to coax him inside after she caught him hovering for maybe the seventh time. He didn't recognize her at first without her headscarf, too wrapped up in Eddie, too—

—and she's right there, what if she says something, Richie's not *ready*  
—

She gives him a friendly little wave, all bright eyed bushy enthusiasm like a cartoon squirrel. Her name's Firuzeh and she's a really effective salesperson, Richie would know all about that, but he's not really in the mood to wax lyrical about it right now because he's having a fucking meltdown.

He raises placating hands, desperation braiding lactic sweat across his top lip. *God*, if only he was psychic. *Please don't, please, he can't find out like this.*

Eddie's still bent over and tugging at the tongues of his sneakers, muttering to himself. His hamstrings rip fibrous up the backs of his thighs and into the suggestive shadows of his shorts. There's a wine-stain hickey on the point of one of his freckled shoulders, and Richie wants to die.

Firuzeh raises her eyebrows and points, clearly mouthing the words *is that him?*

Richie nods, frantically slicing horizontal *cut it out* gestures. He hopes that's what he's doing. He's probably just flailing.

She doesn't come over, thank *fuck*, but she does pull an impressed face and shoot him a double-barrelled thumbs up, before turning back to her stretches. And that's why she's such a good salesperson, she can read people's body language like a book. Even Richie's extremely subtle expressions of torn-up panic. He feels like confetti thrown into a fan, sprayed everywhere, helpless to gather up his pieces before Eddie notices.

“Richie?”

He does spare a moment to feel a little smug, though. Eddie is a babe, Richie’s well aware of that.

“*Richie*,” Eddie repeats, snapping his fingers in Richie’s face. “Ground control to Major Wackjob. Are you alright?”

Richie startles, letting go of his white-knuckled grip on the fence. “Nothing.”

Eddie frowns. “What?”

“Huh? Yeah — I’m fine, why?”

This is another reason Richie has to do it sooner rather than later. He fucking *hates* lying to Eddie, it makes him feel all disgusting and disjointed like a ventriloquist dummy, unnaturally stiff limbed and spewing voices even he doesn’t recognize.

Eddie’s finished performing surgery on his sneakers, and he narrows his eyes. “You look all... jumpy. And pale. Have you drunk enough water? Drink some water, Rich.”

“I don’t need water.”

“We all need water, dumbass.”

Richie rolls his eyes. “I don’t need any water *right now*.”

“*Please* drink some water, or I’m not gonna be able to concentrate.”

Eddie folds his arms, looking stoic, and the stricken, petrified boulder of Richie’s heart softens enough to let it slip back down out of his throat. It’s not that he’s not ready to pop the question — he picked a fucking ring, didn’t he — he just wants it to be perfect. Eddie deserves it, he’s had one bad marriage already, Richie doesn’t wanna start another one off on the wrong foot. If Richie’s imaginary dehydration is enough to distract Eddie from his big race, then proposing two minutes beforehand might just throw in the odd wrench or two. So he swallows his nerves and beams at Eddie, pulling him in for a last quick kiss.

"I *promise* I'll drink some water. Cross my heart and hope to desiccate."

"Good," Eddie says, patting at Richie's chest. "Can't have you shriveling up, I love you too much. Plus, you're my ride home."

"Aw, Eds." An atonal siren cuts through whatever sappy bullshit Richie was gonna dribble out next. It seems to stir the runners up like a lion among gazelles, and Eddie pulls away. "Oh shit, Houston, we launching?"

"We're launching," Eddie nods. And this is why Richie will come to every single one of these things, because a look comes over Eddie's face, then. He looks entirely *himself*. All dark-eyed intensity and determination, not just in his element, but *king* of it.

Richie will never get tired of seeing him like this. He'd follow him into battle anywhere, but he can't really run for shit. That's why he's the roadie.

He shoots Eddie a flashy salute. "Have fun, dude, break a leg!"

Eddie's backing towards the bottleneck and fiddling with his earbuds, still facing him with an excited grin. "That's for *acting*, Richie, don't say that!"

"Pull a groin, then?"

"Asshole," Eddie laughs, flipping him off, and then he's gone, into the anthill mess of people like the sun slipping behind a cloud.

Richie sighs, trying not to miss him too much already.

He can't help feeling the shade of Eddie's absence gray everything out, like passing through the freezing ghost of Richie's previous, empty life. Whatever. He'll add a rung called *co-dependency* to his lost boy ladder, the one he's using to slowly climb out from his Neverland of arrested development.

The race chews the runners up and spits them through the finish line onto the beach at Santa Monica, so Richie drives like Eddie would to find a parking spot in record time, netting himself a clear view. He

bullshits around on Instagram for a while, taking dumb videos, taking selfies with the happily stoned guy who recognizes him and doesn't even seem to realize there's an event happening, but shares his party-sized bag of potato chips anyway.

The ocean breathes in, and out, a great blue leviathan sleeping curled around the city's coastline. An hour passes. Then another. Eddie's killing it, Richie's confident about that. They've taken everything the heatwave threw at them, and now it's nearly over — Eddie's probably running like he's had lead sneakers on all summer, and someone's finally taken them off.

Richie's leaning against the stony bark of a palm tree with an iced coffee dripping all over his arm, scrolling through Twitter, when someone mentions him in a picture message. It's a blurry, zoomed in photo of he and Eddie kissing over the barricade, like some kind of forbidden, Shakespearean shit.

*@TrashmouthTozier why are u at @Dodgers stadium???? who is that with u?? it doesn't look like your bf*

Richie snorts. Like they haven't all seen the photos of Eddie sprinting grimly around Beverly Hills. Plus, their faces are barely discernible. None of these fucking gremlins seem to understand the meaning of the word *privacy*, but luckily, neither does Richie; he's made a living airing his most embarrassing moments on stage, but if there's one thing he doesn't feel about kissing Eddie, it's embarrassed. If he zooms in closer, he can see the possessive splay of Eddie's hands on his face, still feel the phantom sensation of chaste, gentle suction against his lower lip.

He saves the photo quickly to his phone and then retweets it, adding a caption of his own. See, this is what happens when Eddie leaves him alone, he has to resort to fucking around with strangers on the internet instead.

*yep you got me. ive been cheating on him this whole time in extremely public locations bc thats the only way i can achieve climax so thanks for helping out. this is going in the spank bank xx*

There, let 'em frenzy over that for a while, the goddamn piranhas. He

really doesn't mind it at all, any irritation he might've felt was steamrolled long ago by the realization that most people just don't give a fuck that it's a man he's kissing, the issue only ever seems to be *which* man in particular. What he's wearing, what they're doing, and why Richie uploaded a candid picture of him ranting in a flowerbed, up to the elbows in compost past the sleeves of his rubber gloves, and tagged it *#goals*.

Richie thought it was pretty self-explanatory.

In the end, Eddie bags himself a personal record. Beats the shit out of his old one, by like, a *lot*.

The tarmac seems to bow in awe as he comes bombing neatly through the sponsored archway like a heat-seeking missile, and Richie hollers like a moron to make up for the fact that he didn't print a shirt, or make a sign. It's hard to feel too guilty about it when Eddie just keeps running, past the crowd, hurtling closer, and crashes a hug into Richie like a meteor strike.

Richie's nearly bowled over into the forgiving sand, still yelling.

"I did it, I did it," Eddie babbles, tangled damply around Richie's body like a fishing net, and Richie is so dementedly happy to be caught — hook, line, and fucking sinker. "I did it, Rich, I knew I could do it—"

"Fuck yeah you did, Eddie Spaghetti! I toldja, you fast little fucker! I bet you fell on your face at *least* once though, admit it!"

"Nope!" Eddie laughs, and he's too hot to touch, but Richie only clings tighter. "And I didn't shit myself either!"

Eddie keeps talking so much he can't catch his breath, keeps propping all his shook-loose weight up Richie's front, only peeling himself off eventually like a sticky roll of wallpaper to sniff out an official who can log his time. Richie looks down at himself. He plucks at the soft gray shorts he deliberately picked to clash against his t-shirt emblazoned with just the word *Sports* in fancy font, and sees the dark sweat-clone that Eddie left behind.

There have been times in the past, and not-so-distant past, when Richie kinda felt like all the seven sins rolled into one stringy, fraying rope of a person at once. Greed for sure, he can't kick that one. Lust has been fucking his head up since he was thirteen, feeling Eddie's elbow nudge his as they scratched out wonky calculus and Richie hunched despairingly over the desk to keep his boner secret. Sloth resulted in a ghost-writer, but pride was always worst. Pride is insecurity pulled violently inside out, 'til your jagged, self-loathing bones start drawing blood from everyone else for a change. And the worst of it's that it comes and goes, pulling Richie inside and out for years and years, grisly and painful every time.

But Eddie comes scurrying back with a medal and a grin, and Richie thinks there must be a different kinda pride out there, because this one doesn't hurt at all. Eddie brought the official, too, and she takes a picture of them with their arms around each other, Eddie's smile shining even brighter than the medal in the middle of his chest.

Richie tried to park in the shade but the sun is out to get them specifically, and the palm tree shadows have slunk away since morning, abandoning their post. They sit for a moment with the A/C on high, still riding Eddie's well-deserved wave of excitement.

"I felt so good," Eddie gushes for the fifth time. He's a dripping mess, his towel slung regally around his neck like a triumphant king's sweat-heavy ermine. "Sometimes you get days when it feels like you can just keep going, y'know? It was like I couldn't even feel my legs after mile nine—"

"You couldn't *feel your legs?*" Richie laughs. He knew Eddie ran to quiet his body-wide branching anxiety, but this seems extreme. "Sounds like a stroke, buddy."

Eddie looks the drugged kinda happy, how he always looks after Richie makes him come 'til he's shaking. It's all endorphins, Richie supposes, watching Eddie palm exhaustedly at his forehead. "No, that's what I used to think too, and I'd always freak out and stop, but it's like — I don't even have to think, my body just *works*. My legs work, my — my *lungs* work, Richie. It was awesome. I probably coulda done another one!"



His enthusiasm is so infectious. He's fucking *glowing*, and Richie feels like a moth, helplessly willing to blind himself on this human-shaped aurora impossibly contained within the four metal walls of his car.

*This is the real Kaspbrak Fever*, Richie thinks, ruffling the limp disaster of Eddie's hair. *And it really is terminal.*

"You can run home if you wanna," he says.

Eddie shakes his head, busy methodically draining another water bottle. He scoots his chair back, and draws his legs up into some curly Cirque du Soleil type shit, 'til his shorts flap down obscenely close to the hinges of his thighs. Thank fuck the compression things are keeping him decent. Richie shifts in his seat and looks hurriedly out at the beachfront anyway, still crowded and sparkling with people finishing the race. He opens the air vents wider.

"Nah," Eddie grunts. Richie can see him contorting himself from the corner of his eye. Hears a joint crack. "Another day, maybe."

"You could totally do it though. You'd beat the car, I bet."

"That's fuckin' likely, given how you drive."

"Hey," Richie laughs, glancing at him, and quickly away again. Still stretching, fuck. "I'm just saying, you musta been fuckin' flying, dude! I knew you liked my BJs but damn, talk about carrots and sticks."

"Ah, c'mon—"

"Fucking, git along there, little dogie. *Yeehaw.*"

"Shut up," Eddie snickers. "I was trying *not* to think about that. Y'know how hard it is to run with a boner?"

"No, but mark me down as fuckin' *intrigued* that you do." Richie sighs with content, slumping forward against the steering wheel, resting his chin on his folded arms. The A/C is finally making a difference, and he closes his eyes for a moment against the sapphire blitz of the world beyond the windshield. It's hard to tell where the sea and the sky meet, on days like this.

"I mean it though, man," he murmurs. "Fucking flying. It was awesome." Sunlight strives through the palms above, and Richie's closed eyelids, dark, then red, like the flickering negatives from a projector. It's warming his face. He floats on it, like the cast-cotton of a dandelion seed riding the breeze.

"I could watch you forever. That probably sounds creepy as hell, but I don't care. I've tried *not* watching you before for like, a week, but I only lasted a couple days. Back in, uh... '91, I think? Stamina was *not* my friend back then, dude, I used to — there was this stupid thing, I used to only let myself look at you like, five times a day or something, like when you were talking to me, but then I thought, *that doesn't count as a strike*, 'cause people always look at whoever's talking to 'em, y'know? Then, it was whenever you were talking at all. But you were always talking, you're an even bigger fuckin' motormouth than I am, so I decided those times didn't count either, it was allowed. I still had my five strikes. So after that — it was when you were doing something cool, I figured it was okay to look, then, because everyone else would be looking too. Like, when you could solve a Rubik's cube real fast, or you'd do a cannonball into the quarry, but only if someone dared you? So I cheated. I just kept daring you, so I could watch. Or... or the first time we all went to Mike's farm and you held one of his dumb lambs, and you were so freaked it might piss on you that you totally forgot you were already kneeling in shit."

He grins faintly around the lump forming in his throat at the memory. His mind drifts back to the sight of Eddie racing straight past the officials with the medals, like he could see some other prize entirely. "That's what it was like when you crossed that fuckin' finish line, man. I tried not to look so much, but you're always... you're always flying, Eds."

His temples are throbbing. He really should've drunk more water, like Eddie said, but they'll be home soon. He imagines Eddie coming towards him like that while Richie waits at an altar, and the steering wheel digs hard into the meat of his hand as he squeezes it, feeling his bones.

Richie should ask him.

Just drop the fucking bomb already, why not? He should ask *now*, the words are crowding his mouth like loose teeth waiting to fall right out, he should ask him, he should *ask*—

The steering wheel's leather creaks in his fists. He takes a deep breath. "Eddie."

The engine purrs underneath his body. Eddie's suggestive grunting has stopped, so Richie steels himself, blinks open his eyes to look over at the passenger seat, and the words that had felt so safe and solid in his head dissolve on his tongue, like trying to bite steam.

Eddie's staring at him, strangely. His bottom lip sucked into his mouth, paused in the middle of another painful-looking stretch. His leg lowers slowly back to the car's floor, but it's his eyes. They stand out even more when he's flushed so beautifully like this, from the heat or from running or sex, like the night reflected in the ocean. Dark and endless in their deep sockets.

He's looking at Richie wide-eyed, so strangely, and it's kinda terrifying.

"What?" Richie asks, shrinking back a little. "What'd I say?"

Eddie's throat bobs, and his mouth parts. He looks from Richie's face to where his hands are noosed around the wheel.

Richie starts to panic. Maybe he asked it out loud without realizing, and Eddie really is having a stroke. "Eds, what—?"

"Nothing," Eddie croaks, turning away to fasten his seatbelt. "Nothing. I just — thank you for coming today, Rich."

Richie stares at the back of his head. Eddie's ears are deepening to a mouth-watering pink, and his shoulders are slowly hunching up to meet them.

"Where else would I be?"

"...Exactly," Eddie mumbles.

It's still so bright outside, Richie can't see Eddie's expression reflected

in his window, only the fabric of his shorts sprouting up like weeds between his clenched fingers. Why is he being *weird*? It doesn't take this long to pull down a seatbelt.

Richie swallows, crestfallen at the change in mood. Eddie was so buoyant a minute ago. "Are you—?"

"Listen, let's — let's pick up some Popeyes' or something on the way home, I'm starving." Eddie sounds more like himself, springy and demanding. "I haven't had fries for two months."

"Uh. I... okay," Richie says, bewildered. "Yeah, for sure. Record breakers pick dinner, that's fair."

Eddie turns back to him with an easy smile, and whatever weirdness there was is gone. He's probably just tired, Richie reasons. Loopy from those fuckin' endorphins. He can't help but return Eddie's smile with interest when he catches sight of the medal again, and he hopes it's the first of many. They can turn Eddie's old office into a trophy room, or maybe hang it on the Predator statue in the garage.

The moment's passed him by, but at least that black-hole heavy weight is missing from Eddie's eyes. Richie's hands unclench. What the fuck was he thinking? Proposing in the *car*, really? He can't get down on one fucking knee in the car, Jesus Christ. Plus, the ring is at home, hidden among a nest of drum sticks in Richie's music room.

He shakes his head at himself and buckles his own seatbelt.

"I just had a great idea," he says, shifting into gear and pulling into the street.

"Another one?" Eddie must be feeling like Superman after his big finish, untouchable, because he's kicking his feet up onto the dashboard. Richie suddenly wants to give *him* road head, and Eddie's not even the one driving. "The shit-shielding was already so good. You know if you have too many per day your nose is gonna start bleeding."

Richie grins and reaches over to take Eddie's hand, still gritty with sweat. "This is even better. You should wear the medal while we

fuck.”

“Ew, no,” Eddie snorts. “You’re not getting jizz on my medal.”

“Holy shit, why didn’t I think of that!” Richie gasps. “You’re a fucking genius, Eds! I was on some second rate, warm-up act shit, like — *you’re always the winner when you get to fuck me* — not my finest work, I know. But holy shit. I’ll baptize your medal, baby, just say the word.”

Eddie bursts out laughing, his dry wheezes ricocheting around the car like bullets. “I’ll think about it, ya fucking pervert.”

Richie whoops and bangs their joined hands repeatedly on the car horn until Eddie’s yelling about road safety, because he’s the biggest hypocrite Richie knows, and Richie still loves him to such an insane degree that he can’t keep hiding it inside for much longer, depriving it of sunlight.

The photo of them at the finish line is the first one Eddie posts to his decidedly *private* Instagram page. He only has four followers, because Mike is always the last to give into peer pressure even after all these years and still doesn’t have an account.

Richie posts it too, alongside the blurry snap of them kissing, and makes sure to tag Eddie in both. It’s like siccing hellhounds on an unsuspecting rabbit, and Eddie curses Richie out for the resultant avalanche of follow requests blowing up his phone, then blocks him. It doesn’t matter to Richie. Not when he has Eddie coming in his mouth so hard after dinner that he curls like a protective wing right over Richie’s head in his lap, clinging to Richie’s shoulders and making loud, agonized noises in the back of his throat.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

eddie's race number, 109, is the page in my copy of the book with the quote:

*(Eddie runs quite fast he runs quite fast when you're not here runs quite fast when there's nobody around to remind him of how delicate he is and I see in his face Mrs Kaspbrak that he knows even now at the age of nine he knows that the biggest favor in the world he could do himself would be to run fast in any direction you're not going to let him go Mrs Kaspbrak let him RUN)*

let him run :')

my beloved beta reader said "joe how much anguish does it cause you to write from a non-jock pov?" and lemme tell you, it's a lot of anguish

i absolutely promise, the next chapter is the last  
[@skinks](#)